Old
Rose
&
Silver
by
Myrtle
Reed

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B. P. C.

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BY MYRTLE REED

LOVE LETTERS OF A MUSICIAN
LATER LOVE LETTERS OF A MUSICIAN
THE SPINSTER BOOK
LAVENDER AND OLD LACE
PICKABACK SONGS
THE SHADOW OF VICTORY
THE MASTER'S VIOLIN
THE BOOK OF CLEVER BEASTS
AT THE SIGN OF THE JACK-O'-LANTERN
A SPINNER IN THE SUN
LOVE AFFAIRS OF LITERARY MEN
FLOWER OF THE DUSK
OLD ROSE AND SILVER

OLD ROSE AND SILVER

By MYRTLE REED

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Old Rose and Silver

I

A Falling Star

THE last hushed chord died into silence, but the woman lingered, dreaming over the keys. Firelight from the end of the room brought red-gold gleams into the dusky softness of her hair and shadowed her profile upon the opposite wall. No answering flash of jewels met the questioning light—there was only a mellow glow from the necklace of tourmalines, quaintly set, that lay upon the white lace of her gown.

In the Firelight

She turned her face toward the fire as a flower seeks the sun, but her deep eyes looked beyond it, into the fires of Life itself. A haunting sense of unfulfilment stirred her to vague resentment, and she sighed as she rose and moved restlessly about the room.

Are You Dreaming?

She lighted the tall candles that stood upon the mantel-shelf, straightened a rug, moved a chair, and gathered up a handful of fallen rose-petals on her way to the window. She was about to draw down the shade, but, instead, her hand dropped slowly to her side, her fingers unclasped, and the crushed crimson petals fluttered to the floor.

Outside, the purple dusk of Winter twilight lay soft upon the snow. Through an opening in the evergreens the far horizon, grey as mother-of-pearl, bent down to touch the plain in a misty line that was definite yet not clear. At the left were the mountains, cold and calm, veiled by distances dim with frost.

There was a step upon the stair, but the strong, straight figure in white lace did not turn away from the window, even when the door opened. The stillness was broken only by the cheerful crackle of the fire until a sweet voice asked:

"Are you dreaming, Rose?"

Rose turned away from the window then, with a laugh. "Why, I must have been. Will you have this chair, Aunt Francesca?"

She turned a high-backed rocker toward the fire and Madame Bernard leaned back luxuriously, stretching her tiny feet to the blaze. She wore grey satin slippers with high French heels and silver buckles. A bit of

Mutual Admiration

grey silk stocking was visible between the buckle and the hem of her grey gown.

Rose smiled at her in affectionate appreciation. The little old lady seemed like a bit of Dresden china; she was so dainty and so frail. Her hair was lustreless, snowy white, and beautifully, though simply, dressed in a bygone fashion. Her blue eyes were so deep in colour as to seem almost purple in certain lights, and the years had been kind to her. leaving few lines. Her hands, resting on the arms of her chair, had not lost their youthful contour, but around her eyes and the corners of her mouth were the faint prints of many smiles.

"Rose," said Madame Bernard, suddenly, "you are very lovely to-night."

"I was thinking the same of you," responded the younger woman, flushing. "Shall we organise ourselves into a mutual admiration society?"

"We might as well, I think. There seems to be nobody else."

A shadow crossed Rose's face and her beauty took on an appealing wistfulness. She had been sheltered always and she hungered for Life as the sheltered often do. Madame Bernard, for the thousandth time, looked at her curiously. From the shapely foot that tapped restlessly on the rug beneath her white lace gown, to the crown of dusky hair with red-gold lights in it, Rose was made for love

What More?

—and Madame wondered how she had happened to miss it.

"Aunt Francesca," said Rose, with a whimsical sadness, "do you realise that I 'm forty to-day?"

"That 's nothing," returned the other, serenely. "Everybody has been forty, or will be, if they live."

"I have n't lived yet," Rose objected. "I 've only been alive."

" 'While there 's life there 's hope,' " quoted Madame lightly. "What do you want, dear child? Battle, murder, and sudden death?"

"I don't know what I want."

"Let 's take an inventory and see if we can find out. You have one priceless blessing —good health. You have considerably more than your share of good looks. Likewise a suitable wardrobe; not many clothes, but few, and those few, good. Clothes are supposed to please and satisfy women. You have musical talent, a love of books and flowers, a fine appreciation of beauty, a host of friends, and that one supreme gift of the gods—a sense of humour. In addition to all this, you have a comfortable home and an income of your own that enables you to do practically as you please. Could you ask for more?"

"Not while I have you, Aunt Francesca. I suppose I 'm horrid."

"You could n't be, my dear. I 've left marriage out of the question, since, if you 'd had any deep longing for it, you 'd have chosen some one from the horde that has infested my house for fifteen years and more. You 've surely been loved."

Love Takes

Rose smiled and bit her lip. "I think that 's it," she murmured. "I 've never cared for anybody—like that. At least, I don't think I have."

"'When in doubt, don't,'" resumed the other, taking refuge in a platitude. "Is there any one of that faithful procession whom you particularly regret?"

"No," answered Rose, truthfully.

"Love is like a vaccination," continued the little lady in grey, with seeming irrelevance. "When it takes, you don't have to be told."

Her tone was light, almost flippant, and Rose, in her turn, wondered at the woman and her marvellous self-control. At twenty-five, Madame Bernard married a young French soldier, who had chosen to serve his adopted country in the War of the Rebellion. In less than three months, her gallant Captain was brought home to her—dead.

For a long time, she hovered uncertainly between life and death. Then, one day, she sat up and asked for a mirror. The ghost of her former self looked back at her, for her colour was gone, her hair was quickly turning

Which Will You Have?

grey, and the light had vanished from her eyes. Yet the valiant spirit was not broken, and that day, with high resolve, she sent her soul forward upon the new way.

"He was a soldier," she said, "and I, his wife, will be a soldier too. He faced Death bravely and I shall meet Life with as much courage as God will give me. But do not, oh, do not even speak his name to me, or I shall forget I am a soldier and become a woman again."

So, gradually, it became understood that the young soldier's name was not to be mentioned to his widow. She took up her burden and went on, devoting herself to the army service until the war was over. Then she ceased to labour with lint and bandages and betook herself to new surroundings. Her husband's brother offered her a home, but she was unable to accept, for the two men looked so much alike that she could not have borne it. Sometimes, even now, she turned away in pain from Rose, who resembled her father.

"'Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief,'" Madame Bernard was saying. "I seem to run to conversational antiques to-night. 'Doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief—' which will you have, Rose? If I remember rightly, you 've had all but the thief already. Shall I get you a nice embezzler, or will a plain burglar do?"

"Neither," laughed Rose. "I 'm safe from embezzlers, I think, but I live in nightly fear of being burgled, as you well know."

"None the less, we 've got to take the risk. Isabel will not be contented with you and me. She 'll want other hats on the rack besides the prehistoric relic we keep there as a warning to burglars."

"I 'd forgotten Isabel," answered Rose, with a start. "What is she doing?"

"Dressing for dinner. My dear, that child brought three trunks with her and I understand another is coming. She has enough clothes to set up a modest shop, should she desire to 'go into trade,' as the English say."

"I 'd forgotten Isabel," said Rose, again. "We must find some callow youths to amuse her. A girl of twenty can't appreciate a real man."

"Sometimes a girl of forty can't, either," laughed Madame, with a sly glance at Rose. "Cheer up, my dear—I 'm nearing seventy, and I assure you that forty is really very young."

"It 's scarcely infantile, but I 'll admit that I 'm young—comparatively."

"All things are comparative in this world, and perhaps you and Isabel, with your attendant swains, may enable me to forget that I 'm no longer young, even comparatively."

The guest came in, somewhat shyly. She

Enter Isabel

was a cousin of Rose's, on the mother's side, and had arrived only that afternoon or a visit.

"Bless us," said Madame Bernard; "how pretty we are! Isabel, you're a credit to the establishment."

Isabel smiled—a little, cool smile. She was almost as tall as Rose and towered far above the little lady in grey who offered her a welcoming hand and invited her to sit by the fire. Isabel's gown was turquoise blue and very becoming, as her hair and eyes were dark and her skin was fair. Her eyes were almost black and very brilliant; they literally sparkled when she allowed herself to become interested in anything.

"I'm not late, am I?" she asked.

"No," answered Rose, glancing at the clock. "It's ten minutes to seven."

"I couldn't find my things. It was like dressing in a dream, when, as soon as you find something you want, you immediately lose everything else."

"I know," laughed Rose. "I had occasion to pack a suit-case myself last night, during my troubled slumbers."

A large yellow cat appeared mysteriously out of the shadows and came, yawning, toward the fire. He sat down on the edge of Madame's grey gown, and blinked.

Isabel drew her skirts away. "I don't like cats," she said.

"There are cats and cats," remarked Madame Bernard in a tone of gentle rebuke. "Mr. Boffin is not an ordinary cat. He is a gentleman and a scholar and he never forgets his manners."

Subtle Harmony

"I 've wondered, sometimes," said Rose, "whether he really knows everything, or only pretends that he does. He looks very wise."

"Silence and reserve will give anyone a reputation for wisdom," Madame responded. She bent down to stroke the yellow head, but, though Mr. Boffin gratefully accepted the caress, he did not condescend to purr. Presently he stalked away into the shadows, waving his yellow tail.

"What a lovely room this is," observed Isabel, after a pause.

"It 's comfortable," replied Madame. "I could n't live in an ugly place."

Everything in the room spoke eloquently of good taste, from the deep-toned Eastern rug at the hearth to the pictures upon the grey-green walls. There was not a false note anywhere in the subtle harmony of line, colour, and fabric. It was the sort of room that one comes back to, after long absence, with renewed appreciation.

"I love old mahogany," continued Isabel. "I suppose you 've had this a long, long time."

"No, it 's new. To me—I mean. I have

A Grand Affair

some beautiful old French mahogany, but I don't use it."

Her voice was very low at the end of the sentence. She compressed her lips tightly and, leaning forward, vigorously poked the fire. A stream of sparks went up the chimney and quick flames leaped to follow.

"Don't set the house on fire, Aunt Francesca," cautioned Rose. "There 's the dinner gong."

The three went out, Madame Bernard a little ahead and the two younger women together. Rose sat opposite the head of the table and Isabel was placed at Madame's right. In a single glance, the guest noted that the table was perfectly appointed.

"Are you making company of me?" she asked.

"Not at all," smiled Madame. "None the less, there is a clear distinction between eating and dining and we endeavour to dine."

"If Aunt Francesca were on a desert island," said Rose, "I believe she would make a grand affair of her solitary dinner, and have her coffee in the morning before she rolled out of the sand."

The little old lady dimpled with pleasure. "I 'd try to," she laughed. "I think I 'd——"

She was interrupted by a little exclamation

of pleasure from Rose, who had just discovered a small white parcel at her plate. She was untying it with eager fingers, while her colour came and went. A card fluttered out, face upward. "To my dear Rose, with love from Aunt Francesca," was written in a small, quaint hand.

It was a single magnificent ruby set in a ring which exactly fitted. Rose seldom wore rings and wondered, vaguely, how Aunt Francesca knew.

"I filled a finger of one of your gloves," said Madame, as though she had read the thought, "and had it fitted. Simple, was n't it?"

"Oh," breathed Rose, "it 's beautiful beyond words! How shall I ever thank you!"

"Wear it, dear. I 'm so glad you 're pleased!"

"It 's lovely," said Isabel, but the tone was cold and she seemed to speak with an effort. With a swift little stab at the heart, Rose saw that the girl envied her the gift.

"It reconciles me to my years," Rose went on, quickly. "I 'm willing to be forty, if I can have a ring like this."

"Why, Cousin Rose!" cried Isabel, in astonishment. "Are you forty?"

"Yes, dear. Don't be conventional and tell me I don't look it, for I feel it—every year."

The Proper Setting

"I should never have thought it," Isabel murmured.

Rose turned the ring slowly upon her finger and the ruby yielded the deep crimson glow of its heart to the candlelight that softly filled the room. "I 've never had a ruby," she said, "and yet I feel, someway, as though I 'd always had this. It seems as if it belonged to me."

"That 's because it suits you," nodded Madame Bernard. "I hope that sometime our civilisation may reach such a point of advancement that every woman will wear the clothes and jewels that suit her personality, and make her home a proper setting for herself. See how women break their hearts for diamonds—and not one woman in a hundred can wear them."

"Could I wear diamonds?" asked Isabel. She was interested now and her eyes sparkled.

Madame Bernard studied her for a moment before replying. "Yes," she admitted, "you could wear them beautifully, but they do not belong to Rose, or to me."

"What else could I wear?"

"Turquoises, if they were set in silver."

"I have one," Isabel announced with satisfaction. "A lovely big turquoise matrix set in dull silver. But I have no diamonds."

"They 'll come," Rose assured her, "if

you want them. I think people usually get things if they want them badly enough."

Things that "Belong"

Isabel turned to Madame Bernard. "What stones do you wear?" she inquired, politely.

"Only amethysts," she laughed. "I have a pearl necklace, but it does n't quite 'belong,' so I don't wear it. I won't wear anything that does n't 'belong.' "

"How can you tell?"

"By instinct." "I can walk into a shop, look around for a moment, and say: 'please bring me my hat.' The one I ask for is always the right one. It is invariably becoming and suitable, and it 's the same with everything else."

"It 's a wonderful experience to go shopping with Aunt Francesca," put in Rose. "She knows what she wants and goes straight to it, without loss of time. Utterly regardless of fashion, for its own sake, she always contrives to be in the mode, though I believe that if hoop skirts were suited to her, she 'd have the courage of her crinoline, and wear one."

"Let us be thankful they 're not," remarked Madame. "It 's almost impossible to believe it, but they must have looked well upon some women. Every personality makes its own demand for harmony and it is fascinating to me to observe strange people and plan for them their houses and clothes and belongings. You can pick out, from a crowd, the woman who

After Dinner

would have a crayon portrait of herself upon an easel in her parlour, and quite properly, too, since her nature demands it. After you are experienced, you can identify the man who eats sugar and vinegar on lettuce, and group those who keep parrots—or are capable of it."

The seventy years sat lightly upon Madame Francesca now. Her deep eyes shone with inward amusement, and little smiles hovered unexpectedly about the corners of her mouth. A faint pink tint, like a faded rose, bloomed upon her cheeks. Rose watched her with adoring eyes, and wondered whether any man in the world, after fifteen years of close association, could be half so delightful.

Coffee was brought into the living-room, when they went back, preceded by Mr. Boffin, emanating the dignified satisfaction of a cat who has supped daintily upon chicken and cream. He sat down before the fire and methodically washed his face.

"I believe I envy Mr. Boffin his perfect digestion," remarked Madame, as she sipped her coffee from a Royal Canton cup. She and Rose stood for half an hour after dinner, always.

Isabel finished her coffee and set the cup upon the table. She slipped the Sheffield tray from under the embroidered doily and took it to the light, where she leaned over it, studying the design. Rose thought that the light

A Trail of Fire

from the tray was reflected upon the girl's face, she became at once so brilliant, so sparkling.

"Speaking of harmony—" said Madame Bernard, in a low tone, glancing at Rose and inclining her head toward Isabel.

"Yes," replied Isabel, returning the tray to its place; "it is a lovely one, is n't it?"

Madame turned toward the window to hide a smile. Rose followed, and drew the little grey lady into the circle of her strong arm.

"Dear Aunt Francesca!" she said softly. "I thank you so much!"

The older woman patted the hand that wore the ruby, then turned to Isabel. "Come," she said, "and be glad you 're indoors."

The three women stood at the wide window, looking out across the snow, lighted only by the stars and a ghostly crescent of moon. The evergreens were huddled closely together as though they kept each other warm. Beyond, the mountains brooded in their eternal sleep, which riving lightnings and vast, reverberating thunders were powerless to change.

Suddenly, across the purple darkness between the pale stars, flamed a meteor—an uncharted voyager through infinite seas of space. It left a trail of fire across the heavens,

fading at last into luminous mist, the colour of the stars. When the light had quite died out, Madame Bernard spoke.

"A passing soul," she sighed.

"A kiss," breathed Rose, dreamily.

"Star-dust!" laughed Isabel.

II

Welcome Home

Somebody 's Coming

"GREAT news, my dears, great news!" cried Madame Bernard, gaily waving an open letter as she came into the room where Rose was sewing and Isabel experimenting with a new coiffure. "I 'll give you three guesses!"

"Somebody coming for a visit?" asked Isabel.

"Wrong!"

"Somebody coming, but not for a visit?" queried Rose.

"You 're getting warmer."

"How can anybody come, if not for a visit?" inquired Isabel, mildly perplexed. "That is, unless it 's a messenger?"

"The old Kent house is to be opened," said Madame, "and we 're to open it. At last we shall have neighbours!"

"How exciting," Rose answered. She did not wholly share the old lady's pleasure, and wondered with a guilty consciousness of the long hours she spent at her music, whether Aunt Francesca had been lonely.

The Letter

"Listen, girls!" Madame's cheeks were pink with excitement as she sat down with the letter, which had been written in Paris.

"My dear Madame Francesca:

"'At last we are coming home—Allison and I. The boy has a fancy to see Spring come again on his native heath, so we shall sail earlier than we had otherwise planned.

"'I wonder, my dear friend, if I dare ask you to open the house for us? I am so tired of hotels that I want to go straight back. You have the keys and if you will engage the proper number of servants and see that the place is made habitable, I shall be more than ever your debtor. I will cable you when we start.

"'Trusting that all is well with you and yours and with many thanks, believe me, my dear Madame,

"'Most faithfully yours,

"'Richard Kent.'"

"How like a man," smiled Rose. "That house has been closed for over ten years, and he thinks there is nothing to be done but to unlock the front door and engage two or three servants who may or may not be trustworthy."

"What an imposition!" Isabel said. "Aunt Francesca, didn't I meet Allison Kent when I was here before?"

"I 've forgotten."

Memories from Childhood

"Don't you remember? Mother brought me here once when I was a little tot. We stayed about a week and the roses were all in bloom. I can see the garden now. Allison used to come over sometimes and tell me fairy stories. He told me that the long, slender gold-trimmed bottles filled with attar of roses came from the roots of the rose bushes—don't you remember? And I pulled up rose bushes all over the garden to find out."

"Dear me, yes," smiled Aunt Francesca. "How time does fly!"

"You were very cross with Allison—that is, as cross as you ever could be. It seemed so queer for you to be angry at him and not at me, for I pulled up the bushes."

"You were sufficiently punished, Isabel. I believe the thorns hurt your little hands, did n't they?"

"They certainly did," responded the girl, with a little shudder at the recollection. "I have a scar still. That was—let me see—why, it was fifteen years ago!"

"Just before I came to live with Aunt Francesca," said Rose. "You and your mother went away the same day."

"Yes, we went in the morning," Isabel continued, "and you were to come in the afternoon. I remember pleading with my mother to let me stay long enough to see 'Cousin Wose.'"

The Interlude of Years

"Fifteen years!" Madame repeated. "Allison went abroad, then, to study the violin, and the house has been open only once since. Richard came back for a Summer, to attend to some business, then returned to Europe. How the time goes by!"

The letter fell to the floor and Francesca sat dreaming over the interlude of years. Colonel Kent had been her husband's best friend, and after the pitiless sword had cleaved her life asunder, had become hers. At forty the Colonel had married a young and beautiful girl. A year later Francesca had gone to him with streaming eyes, carrying his new-born son in her arms, to tell him that his wife was dead.

Drawn together by sorrow, the two had been as dear to each other as friends may be but seldom are. Though childless herself, Francesca had some of the gifts of motherhood, and, at every step, she had aided and counselled the Colonel in regard to his son, who had his mother's eyes and bore his mother's name. Discerning the boy's talent, long before his father suspected it, she had chosen the violin for him rather than the piano, and had herself urged the Colonel to take him abroad for study though the thought of separation caused her many a pang.

When the two sailed away, Francesca had found her heart strangely empty; her busy hands strangely idle. But Life had taught her

one great lesson, and when one door of her heart was closed, she opened another, as quickly as possible. So she sent for Rose, who was alone in the world, and, for fifteen years, the two women had lived happily together.

As she sat there, thinking, some of her gay courage failed her. For the moment her mask was off, and in the merciless sunlight, she looked old and worn. Rose, looking at her with tender pity, marvelled at the ignorance of man, in asking a frail little old lady to open and make habitable, in less than a fortnight, a house of fifteen large rooms.

"Aunt Francesca," she said, "let me open the house. Tell me what you want done, and Isabel and I will see to it."

"Certainly," agreed Isabel without enthusiasm. "We 'll do it."

"No," Madame replied stubbornly. "He asked me to do it."

"He only meant for you to direct," said Rose. "You surely don't think he meant you to do the scrubbing?"

Madame smiled at that, and yielded gracefully. "There must be infinite scrubbing, after all these years. I believe I 'll superintend operations from here. Then, when it 's all done, I 'll go over and welcome them home."

"That is as it should be. Isabel and I will go over this afternoon, and when we come back, we can tell you all about it."

The Old House

"You 'd better drive—I 'm sure the paths are n't broken."

So, after luncheon, the two started out with the keys, Madame waving them a cheery good-bye from the window.

"Everything about this place seems queer to me," said Isabel. "It 's the same, and yet not the same."

"I know," Rose answered. "Things are much smaller, are n't they?"

"Yes. The rooms used to be vast and the ceilings very far away. Now, they 're merely large rooms with the ceilings comfortably high. The garden used to seem like a huge park, but now it 's only a large garden. There used to be a great many steps in the stairway, and high ones at that. Now it 's nothing compared with other flights. Only Aunt Francesca remains the same. She has n't changed at all."

"She 's a saint," said Rose with deep conviction, as the carriage turned into the driveway.

The house, set far back from the street, was of the true Colonial type, with stately white pillars at the dignified entrance. The garden was a tangled mass of undergrowth—in spite of the snow one could see that—but the house, being substantially built, had changed scarcely at all.

"A new coat of paint will freshen it up amaz-

Cobwebs and Chill

ingly," said Rose, as they went up the steps. She was thrilled with a mysterious sense of adventure which the younger woman did not share. "I feel like a burglar," she continued, putting the key into the rusty lock.

"I feel cold," remarked Isabel, shivering in her furs.

At last the wide door swung on its creaking hinges and they went into the loneliness and misery of an empty house The dust of ages had settled upon everything and penetrated every nook and cranny. The floors groaned dismally, and the scurrying feet of mice echoed through the walls. Cobwebs draped the windows, where the secret spinners had held high carnival, undisturbed. An indescribable musty odour almost stifled them and the chill dampness carried with it a sense of gloom and foreboding.

"My goodness!" Isabel exclaimed. "Nobody can ever live here again."

"Don't be discouraged," laughed Rose. "Soap, water, sunshine, and fire can accomplish miracles."

At the end of the hall a black, empty fireplace yawned cavernously. There was another in the living-room and still another in the library back of it. Isabel opened the door on the left. "Why, there 's another fireplace in the dining-room," she said. "Do you suppose they have one in the kitchen, too?"

Making Notes

"Go in and see, if you like."

"I 'm afraid to go alone. You come, too."

There was no fireplace in the kitchen, but the rusty range was sadly in need of repair.

"I 'm going down cellar," Rose said. "Are you coming?"

"I should say not. Hurry back, won't you?"

Rose went cautiously down the dark, narrow stairway. The light was dim in the basement but she could see that there was no coal. She went back and forth several times from bin to window, making notes in a small memorandum book. She was quite determined that Aunt Francesca should be able to find no fault with her housekeeping.

When she went back, there were no signs of Isabel. She went from room to room, calling, then concluded that she had gone back to the carriage, which was waiting outside.

Rose took measurements for new curtains in all the rooms on the lower floor, then climbed the creaking stairway. She came upon Isabel in the sitting-room, upstairs, standing absorbed before an open desk. In her hand she held something which gleamed brightly, even in the gathering shadow.

"Isabel!" she cried, in astonishment.

The girl turned and came forward. Her eyes were sparkling. "Look! There 's a secret

drawer in the desk and I found this in it. I love secret drawers, don't you?"

"I never have looked for them in other people's houses," Rose answered, coldly.

"I never have either," retorted Isabel, "except when I 've been invited to clean other people's houses."

There was something so incongruous in the idea of Isabel cleaning a house that Rose laughed and the awkward moment quickly passed.

"Look," said Isabel, again.

Rose took it from her hand—a lovely miniature framed in brilliants. A sweet, old-fashioned face was pictured upon the ivory in delicate colours—that of a girl in her early twenties, with her smooth, dark hair drawn back over her ears. A scarf of real lace was exquisitely painted upon the dark background of her gown. The longing eyes held Rose transfixed for an instant before she noted the wistful, childish droop of the mouth. The girl who had posed for the miniature, if she had been truthfully portrayed, had not had all that she asked from life.

"Look at this," Isabel continued.

She offered Rose a bit of knitting work, from which the dust of years fell lightly. It had once been white, and the needles were still there, grey and spotted with rust. Rose guessed that the bit had been intended for a

A Dashing Young Soldier

baby's shoe, but never finished. The little shoe had waited, all those years, for hands that never came back from the agony in which they wrung themselves to death in the room beyond.

The infinite pity of it stirred Rose to quick tears, but Isabel was unmoved. "Here's something else," she said.

She shook the dust from an old-fashioned daguerreotype case, then opened it. On the left side was a young soldier in uniform, full length—a dashing, handsome figure with one hand upon a drawn sword. Printed in faded gilt upon the dusty red satin that made up the other half of the case, the words were still distinct: "To Colonel Richard Kent, from his friend, Jean Bernard."

"Jean Bernard!" Isabel repeated, curiously. "Who was he?"

"Aunt Francesca's husband," answered Rose, with a little catch in her voice, "and my uncle. He died in the War."

"Oh," said Isabel, unmoved. "He was nice looking, was n't he? Shall we take this to Aunt Francesca?"

"You forget that it is n't ours to take," Rose reminded her. "And, by the way, Isabel, you must never speak to Aunt Francesca of her husband. She cannot bear it."

"All right," assented the girl. "What is this?"

From the back of the drawer she took out a bronze medal, with a faded ribbon of red, white, and blue attached to it. She took it to the light, rubbed it with her handkerchief, and slowly made out the words: "Awarded to Colonel Richard Kent, for conspicuous bravery in action at Gettysburg."

"Put the things back," Rose suggested, gently. This tiny, secret drawer, Colonel Kent's holy of holies, symbolised and epitomised the best of a man's life. The medal for military service, the miniature of his wife, the picture of his friend, and the bit of knitting work that comprehended a world of love and anguish and bereavement—these were the hidden chambers of his heart.

Isabel took up the miniature again before she closed the drawer. "Do you suppose those are diamonds?"

"No; only brilliants."

"I thought so. If they 'd been diamonds, he would never have left them here."

"On the contrary," answered Rose, "I 'm very sure he would." She had met Colonel Kent only a few times, years ago, during the Summer he had spent at home while Allison was still abroad, but she knew him now, nevertheless.

They went on through the house, making notes of what was needed, while their footsteps echoed and re-echoed through the

Three C's

empty rooms. "I'm glad there are no carpets, except on the stairs," said Rose, "for rugs are much easier to clean. It resolves itself simply into three C's—coal, curtains, and cleaning. It won't take long, if we can get enough people to work at it."

It was almost dusk when they went downstairs, but the cold slanting sunbeams of a Winter afternoon came through the grimy windows and illumined the gloomy depths of the open fireplace in the hall. Motes danced in the beam, and the house somehow seemed less despairing, less alone. A portrait of Colonel Kent, in uniform, hung above the great mantel. Rose smiled at it with comprehension, but the painted lips did not answer, nor the unseeing eyes swerve from their steady searching of Beyond.

"How was it?" asked Madame, when they reached home. "Dirty and bad?"

"Rather soiled," admitted Rose.

"And colder than Greenland," Isabel continued, warming her hands at the open fire.

"We'll soon change all that," Madame said. "I've ordered coal and engaged people to do the cleaning since you've been gone, and I have my eye upon two permanent retainers, provided their references are satisfactory."

"I've measured for all the curtains," Rose went on. "Shall we make them or buy them?"

Every-thing Ready

"We 'll make them. If we have help enough we can get them done in time."

The following day a small army, with Rose at the head of it, took possession of the house. Every night she came home exhausted, not from actual toil, but from the effort to instil the pride of good service into unwilling workers who seemed to rejoice in ignorance.

"I 'm tired," Rose remarked, one night. "I 've cerebrated all day for seven bodies besides my own and I find it wearing."

"I don't wonder," answered Madame. "I 'll go over to-morrow and let you rest."

"Indeed you won't," declared Rose, with emphasis. "I 've begun it and I 'm going to finish it unless the Seven Weary Workers fail me absolutely."

At last the task was completed, and even Rose could find no speck of dust in the entire establishment. The house was fresh with the smell of soap-suds and floor wax and so warm that several windows had to be kept open. The cablegram had come while the curtains were being made, but everything was ready two days before the wayfarers could possibly reach home.

On the appointed day, Rose and Isabel were almost as excited as Madame Bernard herself. She had chosen to go over alone to greet the Colonel and his son. They were expected to arrive about four in the afternoon.

The Home Coming

At three, Madame set forth in her carriage. She wore her best gown, of lavender crêpe, trimmed with real lace, and a bunch of heliotrope at her belt. Rose had twined a few sprays of heliotrope into her snowy hair and a large amethyst cross hung from her neck by a slender silver chain. She wore no other jewels except her wedding ring.

Fires blazed cheerily in every fireplace on the lower floor, and there was another in the sitting-room upstairs. She had filled the house with the flowers of Spring—violets, daffodils, and lilies of the valley. A silver tea-kettle with a lamp under it waited on the library table.

When she heard the wheels creaking in the snowy road, Madame lighted the lamp under the kettle with her own hands, then opened the door wide. Followed by their baggage, the two men came up the walk—father and son.

The Colonel was a little older, possibly, but still straight and tall—almost as tall as the son who walked beside him, carrying a violin case under his arm. He wore the familiar slouch hat, the same loose overcoat, and the same silvery goatee, trimmed most carefully. His blue eyes lighted up warmly at the sight of the figure in the doorway.

"Welcome home!" cried Madame Francesca, stretching a hand toward each. "Welcome home!"

Allison only smiled, taking the little hand in his strong young clasp, but his father bent, hat in hand, to kiss the one she offered him.

"Oh," cried Madame, "I 'm so glad to see you both. Come in!"

They entered their own hospitable house, where fires blazed and the kettle sang. "Say," said Allison, "is n't this great! Why did we ever leave it? Is n't it fine, Father?"

But "father" still had his eyes upon the dainty little lady who had brought forth the miracle of home from a wilderness of dust and ashes. He bent again over the small, white hand.

"A woman, a fire, and a singing kettle," he said. "All the dear, familiar spirits of the house to welcome us home."

III

The Voice of the Violin

MADAME BERNARD and Isabel had not yet come down when Rose entered the living-room, half an hour before dinner. The candles were lighted, and in the soft glow of the reading lamp was a vase of pink roses, sent by Colonel Kent to his old friend. The delicate sweetness filled the room and mingled with the faint scent of attar of roses and dried rose petals which, as always, hung about the woman who stood by the table, idly rearranging the flowers.

The ruby ring caught the light and sent tiny crimson gleams dancing into the far shadows. Her crêpe gown was almost the colour of the ruby; warm and blood-red. It was cut low at the throat, and an old Oriental necklace of wonderfully wrought gold was the only ornament she wore, aside from the ring. The low light gave the colour of the gown back to her face, beautiful as always, and in her dusky hair she had a single crimson rose.

Aunt Francesca had said that the Colonel

Madame's Fancy

was very much pleased with the house and glad to be at home again. She had sent over her own cook to prepare their first dinner, which, however, she had declined to share, contenting herself with ordering a feast suited to the Colonel's taste. To-night, they were to dine with her and meet the other members of her household.

Madame came in gowned in lustreless white, with heliotrope at her belt and in her hair. She wore a quaintly wrought necklace of amethysts set in silver, and silver buckles, set with amethysts, on her white shoes. More than once Rose had laughingly accused her of being vain of her feet.

"Why should n't I be vain?" she had retorted, in self-defence. "Are n't they pretty?"

"Of course they are," smiled Rose, bending down to kiss her. "They 're the prettiest little feet in all the world."

Madame's fancy ran seriously to shoes and stockings, of which she had a marvellous collection. Silk stockings in grey and white, and in all shades of lavender and purple, embroidered and plain, with shoes to match in satin and suède, occupied a goodly space in her wardrobe. At Christmas-time and on her birthday, Rose always gave her more, for it was the one gift which could never fail to please.

"How lovely the house is," said Madame,

A Simple Melody

looking around appreciatively. "I hope the dinner will be good."

"I 've never known it to be otherwise," Rose assured her.

"Am I all right? Is my skirt even?"

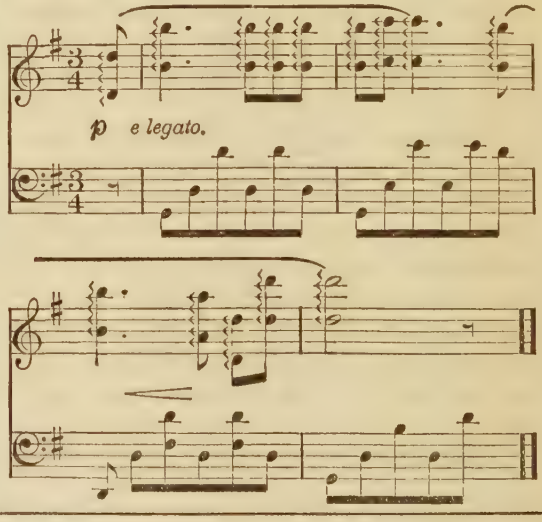
"You are absolutely perfect, Aunt Francesca."

"Then play to me, my dear. If my outward semblance is in keeping, please put my mind into a holiday mood."

Rose ran her fingers lightly over the keys. "What shall I play?"

"Anything with a tune to it, and not too loud."

Smiling, Rose began one of the simple melodies that Aunt Francesca loved:



"You 're Gorgeous"

Suddenly, she turned away from the piano. Her elbow, falling upon the keys, made a harsh dissonance. "Isabel, my dear!" she cried. "Are n't you almost too gorgeous?"

The girl stood in the open door, framed like a portrait, against the dull red background of the hall. Her gown was white net, shot and spangled with silver, over lustrous white silk. A comb, of filagree silver, strikingly lovely in her dark hair, was her only ornament except a large turquoise, set in dull silver, at her throat.

"I 'm not overdressed, am I?" she asked, with an eager look at Madame.

"Not if it suits you. Come here, dear."

Isabel obeyed, turning around slowly for inspection. Almost instantly it was evident that Madame approved. So did Rose, after she saw how the gown made Isabel's eyes sparkle and brought out the delicate fairness of her skin.

"You do suit yourself; there 's no question about that, but you 're gorgeous, nevertheless." Thus Rose made atonement for her first impulsive speech.

Mr. Boffin came in, with a blue ribbon around his neck, and helped himself to Aunt Francesca's chair. Isabel rocked him and he got down, without undue haste. He marched over to a straight-backed chair with a cushion in it; glared at Isabel for a moment with his inscrutable topaz eyes, then began to purr.

The clock chimed seven silvery notes. Ma-

Greetings

dame Bernard waved her white lace fan impatiently. "It 's the psychological moment," Rose observed. "Why don't they come?"

"It 's Allison's fault, if they 're late," Madame assured her. "I could always set my watch by the Colonel. He—there, what did I tell you?" she concluded triumphantly, as footsteps sounded outside.

When the guests were ushered in, Madame advanced to meet them. The firelight had brought a rosy glow to her lovely face, and her deep eyes smiled. Allison put his violin case in a corner before he spoke to her.

"Did you really?" asked Madame. "How kind you are!"

"I brought it," laughed the young man, "just because you did n't ask me to."

"Do you always," queried Rose, after he had been duly presented to her, "do the things you 're not asked to do?"

"Invariably," he replied.

"Allison," said Madame, "I want you to meet my niece once removed—Miss Ross." The Colonel had already bowed to Isabel and was renewing his old acquaintance with Rose.

"Not Isabel," said Allison, in astonishment.

"Yes," answered the girl, her eyes sparkling with excitement, "it 's Isabel."

"Why, little playmate, how did you ever dare to grow up?"

"I had nothing else to do."

"But I did n't want you to grow up," he objected.

"You 've grown up some yourself," she retorted.

"I suppose I have," he sighed. "What a pity that the clock won't stand still!"

Yet, to Madame, he did not seem to have changed much. He was taller, and more mature in every way, of course. She noted with satisfaction that he had gained control of his hands and feet, but he had the same boyish face, the same square, well-moulded chin, and the same nice brown eyes. Only his slender, nervous hands betrayed the violinist.

"Well, are you pleased with me?" he asked of Madame, his eyes twinkling.

"Yes," she answered with a faint flush. "If you had worn long hair and a velvet collar, I should never have forgiven you."

Colonel Kent laughed outright. "I should never have dared to bring him back to you, Francesca, if he had fallen so low. We 're Americans, and please God, we 'll stay Americans, won't we, lad?"

"You bet," answered Allison, boyishly, going over to salute Mr. Boffin. "'But in spite of all temptations to belong to other nations, I 'm an Am-er-i-can,'" he sang, under his breath. Through the mysterious workings of some sixth sense, Mr. Boffin perceived

Table Talk

approaching trouble and made a hurried escape.

"Will you look at that?" asked Allison, with a hearty laugh. "I had n't even touched him and he became suspicious of me."

"As I remember," Madame said, "my cats never got on very well with you."

"I don't like them either," put in Isabel.

"I like 'em," Allison said. "I like 'em a whole lot, but it is n't mutual, and I never could understand why."

At dinner, it seemed as though they all talked at once. Madame and the Colonel had a separate conversation of their own, while Allison "reminisced" with Isabel, as he said, and asked numerous questions of Rose in regard to the neighbours.

"Please tell me," he said, "what has become of the Crosby twins?"

"They 're flourishing," Rose answered.

"You don't mean it! What little devils they were!"

"Are," corrected Rose.

"Who are the Crosby twins?" inquired Isabel.

"They 'll probably call on you," Rose replied, "so I won't spoil it by endeavouring to describe them. The language fails to do them justice."

"What were their names?" mused Allison. "Let me see. Oh, yes, Romeo and Juliet."

"'Romie' and 'Jule' by affectionate abbreviation, to each other," Rose added. Did you know that an uncle died in Australia and left them a small fortune?"

"Romie" and "Jule"

"No, I did n't. What are they doing with it?"

"Do you remember, when you were a child, how you used to plan what you'd do with unlimited wealth?"

Allison nodded.

"Well," Rose resumed, "that 's just what they 're doing with it. They have only the income now, but this Fall, when they 're twenty-one, they 'll come into possession of the principal. I prophesy bankruptcy in five years."

"Even so," he smiled, "they 'll doubtless have pleasant memories."

"What satisfaction do you think there will be in that?" queried Isabel.

"I can't answer just now," Allison replied, "but the minute I 'm bankrupt, I 'll come and tell you. It 's likely to happen to me at any time."

Meanwhile Colonel Kent was expressing the pleasure he had found in his well-appointed household. "Was it very much trouble, Francesca?"

"None at all—to me."

"You always were wonderful."

"You see," she smiled, "I did n't do it.

Rose did everything. I merely went over at the last to arrange the flowers, make the tea, and receive the credit."

"And to welcome us home," he added. "They say a fireplace is the heart of a house, but I think a woman is the soul of it."

"Then the soul of it was there, waiting, was n't it?"

"But only for a little while," he sighed. "I am very lonely sometimes, in spite of the boy."

Francesca's blue eyes became misty. "When a door in your heart is closed," she said, "turn the key and go away. Opening it only brings pain."

"I know," he answered, clearing his throat. "You 've told me that before and I 've often thought of it. Yet sometimes it seems as though all of life was behind that door."

"Ah, but it is n't. Your son and at least one true friend are outside. Listen!"

"No," Allison was saying, "I got well acquainted with surprisingly few people over there. You see, I always chummed with Dad."

"Bless him," said Francesca, impulsively.

"Have I done well?" asked the Colonel, anxiously. "It was hard work, alone."

"Indeed you have done well. I hear that he is a great artist."

"He 's more than that—he 's a man. He 's clean and a good shot, and he is n't afraid of

A Spirit of Longing

anything. Someway, to me, a man who played the fiddle always seemed, well—lady-like, you know. But Allison is n't."

"No," answered Francesca, demurely," he is n't. Do I infer that it is a disgrace to be ladylike?"

"Not for a woman," laughed the Colonel. "Why do you pretend to misunderstand me? You always know what I mean."

After dinner, when the coffee had been served, Allison took out his violin, of his own accord. "You have n't asked me to play, but I 'm going to. Who is going to play my accompaniment? Don't all speak at once."

Rose went to the piano and looked over his music. "I 'll try. Fortunately I 'm familiar with some of this."

His first notes came with a clearness and authority for which she was wholly unprepared. She followed the accompaniment almost perfectly, but mechanically, lost as she was in the wonder and delight of his playing. The exquisite harmony seemed to be the inmost soul of the violin, speaking at last, through forgotten ages, of things made with the world—Love and Death and Parting. Above it and through it hovered a spirit of longing, infinite and untranslatable, yet clear as some high call.

Subtly, Rose answered to it. In some mysterious way, she seemed set free from bondage.

Halfway Between

Unsuspected fetters loosened; she had a sense of largeness, of freedom which she had never known before. She was quivering in an ecstasy of emotion when the last chord came.

For an instant there was silence, then Isabel spoke. "How well you play!" she said politely.

"I ought to," Allison replied, modestly. "I 've worked hard enough."

"How long have you been studying?"

"Thirty years," he answered. "That is, I feel as if I had been at work all my life."

"How funny!" exclaimed Isabel. "Are you thirty?"

"Just," he said.

"Then Cousin Rose and I are like steps, with you half way between us. I 'm twenty and she 's forty," smiled Isabel, with childlike frankness.

Rose bit her lips, then the colour flamed into her face. "Yes," she said, to break an awkward pause, "I 'm forty. Old Rose," she added, with a forced smile.

"Nonsense," said Allison quickly. "How can a rose be old?"

"Or," continued the Colonel, with an air of old-world gallantry, "how can earth itself be any older, having borne so fair a rose upon its breast for forty years?"

"Thank you both," responded Rose, her high colour receding. "Shall we play again?"

New Values

While they were turning over the music Madame grappled with a temptation to rebuke Isabel then and there. "Not fit for a parlour yet," she thought. "Ought to be in the nursery on a bread and milk diet and put to bed at six."

For her part, Isabel dimly discerned that she had said something awkward, and felt vaguely uncomfortable. She was sorry if she had made a social mistake and determined to apologise afterward, though she disliked apologies.

Allison was playing again, differently, yet in the same way. Through the violin sounded the same high call to Rose. Life assumed a new breadth and value, as from a newly discovered dimension. She had been in it, yet not of it, until now. She was merged insensibly with something vast and universal, finite yet infinite, unknown and undreamed-of an hour ago.

She was quite pale when they finished. "You 're tired," he said. "I 'm sorry."

"I 'm not," she denied, vigorously.

"But you are," he insisted. "Don't you suppose I can see?" His eyes met hers for the moment, clearly, and, once more, she answered an unspoken summons in some silent way. The room turned slowly before her; their faces became white spots in a mist.

"You play well," Allison was saying. "I wish you 'd let me work with you."

Some Great Question

"I 'll be glad to," Rose answered, with lips that scarcely moved.

"Will you help me work up my programs for next season?"

"Indeed I will. Don't stop now, please—really, I 'm not tired."

While she was still protesting, he led her away from the piano to an easy chair. "Sit there," he said, "and I 'll do the work. Those accompaniments are heavy."

He went back to his violin, tightened a string, and began to play, alone. The melody was as delicate in structure as the instrument itself, yet strangely full of longing. Slowly the violin gave back the music of which it was made; the wind in the forest, the sound of many waters, moonlight shimmering through green aisles of forest, the mating calls of Spring. And again, through it all, surged some great question to which Rose thrilled in unspoken answer; a great prayer, which, in some secret way, she shared.

It came to an end at last when she felt that she could bear no more. "What is it?" she forced herself to ask.

"I have n't named it," he replied, putting down his violin.

"Is—is it—yours?"

"Of course. Why not?"

Isabel came to the piano and took up the violin. "May I look at it?"

A Sacred Trust

"Certainly."

She stroked the brown breasts curiously and twanged the strings as though it were a banjo. "What make is it?"

"Cremona. Dad gave it to me for Christmas, a long time ago. It belonged to an old man who died of a broken heart."

"What broke his heart?" queried Isabel, carelessly.

"One of his hands was hurt in some way, and he could play no more."

"Not much to die of," Isabel suggested, practically.

"Ah, but you don't know," he answered, shaking his head.

Francesca had leaned forward and was speaking to Colonel Kent in a low tone. "I think that somewhere, in the House not Made with Hands, there is a young and lovely mother who is very proud of her boy to-night."

The Colonel's fine face took on an unwonted tenderness. "I hope so. She left me a sacred trust."

Francesca crossed the room, drew the young man's tall head down, and kissed him. "Well done, dear foster-child. Your adopted mother, once removed, is fully satisfied with you, and very much pleased with herself, being, vicariously, the parent of a great artist."

"I hope you don't consider me 'raised,'"

"Cousin Rose"

replied Allison. "You 're not going to stop 'mothering' me, are you?"

"I could n't," was her smiling assurance. "I 've got the habit."

He seemed very young as he looked down at her. Woman-like she loved him, through the man that he was, for the child that he had been.

"Come, lad," the Colonel suggested, "it 's getting late and we want to be invited again."

Allison closed his violin case with a snap, said good-night to Aunt Francesca, then went over to Rose. "I don't feel like calling you 'Miss Bernard,'" he said. "May n't I say 'Cousin Rose,' as we rejoice in the possession of the same Aunt?"

"Surely," she answered, colouring faintly.

"Then good-night, Cousin Rose. I 'll see you soon again, and we 'll begin work. Your days of leisure are over now."

Isabel offered him a small, cool hand. Her eyes were brilliant, brought out by the sparkling silver of her gown. She glittered even in the low light of the room. "Good-night, Silver Girl," he said. "You have n't really grown up after all."

When the door closed, Rose gathered up the music he had forgotten, and put it away. Isabel came to her contritely. "Cousin Rose, I 'm so sorry I said that! I did n't think!"

"Don't bother about it," Rose replied,

kindly. "It was nothing at all, and, besides, it 's true."

"'Tell the truth and shame the——family,'" misquoted Madame Bernard. "Age and false hair are not things to be flaunted, Isabel, remember that."

Isabel flushed at the rebuke, and her cheeks were still burning when she went to her room.

"I don't care," she said to herself, with a swift change of mood. "I 'm glad I told him. They 'd never have done it, and it 's just as well for him to know."

Madame Bernard and Rose soon followed her example, but Rose could not sleep. Through the night the voice of the violin sounded through her consciousness, calling, calling, calling—heedless of the answer that thrilled her to the depths of her soul.

IV

The Crosby Twins

A Formal Call

THE Crosby twins were making a formal call upon Isabel. They had been skating and still carried their skates, but Juliet wore white gloves and had pinned her unruly hair into some semblance of order while they waited at the door. She wore a red tam-o'-shanter on her brown curls and a white sweater under her dark green skating costume, which was short enough to show the heavy little boots, just now filling the room with the unpleasant odour of damp leather.

"Won't you take off your coat?" asked Isabel. "You 'll catch cold when you go out, if you don't take it off."

"Thanks," responded Juliet, somewhat stiffly. Then she stretched out both hands to her hostess, laughing as she did so. "Look!" The sweater sleeves had crept up to her elbows, displaying several inches of bare, red arm between the sleeves and the short white gloves.

"That 's just like us," remarked Romeo.

"If we try to be elegant, something always happens."

The twins looked very much alike. They were quite tall and still retained the dear awkwardness of youth, in spite of the near approach of their twenty-first birthday. They had light brown curly hair, frank blue eyes that met the world with interest and delight, well-shaped mouths, not too small, and stubborn little chins. A high colour bloomed on their cheeks and they fairly radiated the joy of living.

"Can you skate?" inquired Romeo.

"No," smiled Isabel.

"Juliet can. She can skate as far as I can, and almost as fast."

"Romie taught me," observed Juliet, with becoming modesty.

"Do you play hockey? No, of course you don't, if you don't skate," he went on, answering his own question. "Can you swim?"

"No," responded Isabel, sweetly.

"Jule 's a fine swimmer. She saved a man's life once, two Summers ago."

"Romie taught me," said Juliet, beaming at her brother.

"Can you row?" he asked, politely.

"No," replied Isabel, shortly. "I 'm afraid of the water."

"Juliet can row. She won the women's canoe race in the regatta last Summer. The prize was twenty-five dollars in gold."

"What Can You Do?"

"Romie taught me," put in Juliet.

"We'll teach you this Summer," said Romeo, with a frank, boyish smile that showed his white teeth.

"Thank you," responded Isabel, inwardly vowing that they would n't.

"Juliet can do most everything I can," went on Romeo, with the teacher's pardonable pride in his pupil. "She can climb a tree in her knickers, and fish and skate and row and swim and fence, and play golf and tennis, and shoot, and dive from a spring board, and she can ride anything that has four legs."

"Romeo taught me," chanted Juliet, in a voice surprisingly like his own.

There was an awkward pause, then Romeo turned to his hostess. "What can you do?" he asked, meaning to be deferential. Isabel thought she detected a faint trace of sarcasm, so her answer was rather tart.

"I don't do many of the things that men do," she said, "but I speak French and German, I can sing and play a little, sew and embroider, and trim hats if I want to, and paint on china, and do two fancy dances. And when I go back home, I'm going to learn to run an automobile."

The twins looked at each other. "We never thought of it," said Juliet, much crestfallen.

"Wonder how much they cost," remarked Romeo, thoughtfully.

Lots of Money

"Where can you buy 'em?" Juliet inquired. 'Anywhere in town?"

"I suppose so," Isabel assented. "Why?"

"Why?" they repeated together. "We're going to buy one and learn to run it!"

"You must have lots of money," said Isabel, enviously.

"Loads," replied Romeo, with the air of a plutocrat. "More than we can spend."

"We get our income the first day of every month," explained Juliet, "and put it into the bank, but when the next check comes, there's always some left." They seemed to consider it a mild personal disgrace.

"Why don't you save it?" queried Isabel.

"What for?" Romeo demanded, curiously.

"Why, so you 'll have it if you ever need it."

"It keeps right on coming," Juliet explained, pulling down her sweater. "Uncle died in Australia and left it to us. He died on the thirtieth of June, and we always celebrate."

"Why don't you celebrate his birthday?" suggested Isabel, "instead of the day he died?"

"His birthday was no good to us," replied Romeo, "but his death-day was."

"But if he had n't been born, he could n't have died," Isabel objected, more or less logically.

"And if he had n't died, his being born would n't have helped us any," replied Juliet, with a dazzling smile.

What Is Needed

There was another pause. "Will you have some tea?" asked Isabel.

"With rum in it?" queried Juliet.

"I don't think so," said Isabel, doubtfully. "Aunt Francesca never does."

"We don't, either," Romeo explained, "except when it's very cold, and then only a teaspoonful."

"The doctor said we did n't need stimulants. What was it he said we needed, Romie?"

"Sedatives."

"Yes, that was it—sedatives. I looked it up in the dictionary. It means to calm, or to moderate. I think he got the word wrong himself, for we don't need to be calmed, or moderated, do we, Romie?"

"I should say not!"

The twins sipped their tea in silence and nibbled daintily at wafers from the cracker jar. Then, feeling that their visit was over, they rose with one accord.

"We 've had a dandy time," said Juliet, crushing Isabel's hand in hers.

"Bully," supplemented Romeo. "Come and see us."

"I will," Isabel responded, weakly. "How do you get there?"

"Just walk up the main road and turn to the left. It 's about three miles."

"Three miles!" gasped Isabel. "I 'll drive out."

"Just so you come," Romeo said, graciously. "It 's an awful old place. You 'll know it by the chimney being blown over and some of the bricks lying on the roof. Good-bye."

Juliet turned to wave her hand at Isabel as they banged the gate, and Romeo awkwardly doffed his cap. Their hostess went up-stairs with a sigh of relief. She had the sensation of having quickly closed a window upon a brisk March wind.

The twins set their faces toward home. The three-mile walk was nothing to them, even after a day of skating. The frosty air nipped Juliet's cheeks to crimson and she sniffed at it with keen delight.

"It 's nice to be out," she said, "after being in that hot house. What do you think of her, Romie?"

"Oh, I don't know," he replied carelessly. "Say, how did she have her hair done up?"

"She had rats in it, and it was curled on a hot iron."

"Rats? What in thunder is—or are—that, or they?"

"Little wads of false hair made into cushiony rolls."

"Did she tell you?"

"No," laughed Juliet. "Don't you suppose I can see a rat?"

"I thought rats had to be smelled."

"Not this kind."

A Fascinating Subject

"She smelled of something kind of sweet and sticky. What was it?"

"Sachet powder, I guess, or some kind of perfume."

"I liked the smell. Can we get some?"

"I guess so—we 've got the price."

"Next time you see her, ask her what it is, will you?"

"All right," answered Juliet, unperturbed by the request.

The rest of the way was enlivened by a discussion of automobiles. Romeo had a hockey match on for the following day, which was Saturday, so they were compelled to postpone their investigations until Monday. It seemed very long to wait.

"It 's no good now, anyhow," said Romeo. "We can't run it until the roads melt and dry up."

"That 's so," agreed his twin, despondently. "Why did she tell us now? Why could n't she wait until we had some chance?"

"I guess we can learn something about it before we try to run it," he observed, cheerfully. "If we can get it into the barn, we can take it all apart and see how it 's put together."

"Oh, Romie!" cried Juliet, with a little skip. "How perfectly fascinating! And we 'll read all the automobile literature we can get hold of. I do so love to be posted!"

Upon the death of their father, several years

High Carnival

ago, the twins had promptly ceased to go to school. The kindly old minister who had been appointed executor of their father's small estate and guardian of the tumultuous twins had been unable to present any arguments in favour of systematic education which appealed to them even slightly.

"What good is Latin?" asked Romeo, apparently athirst for information.

"Why—er—mental discipline, mostly," the harassed guardian had answered.

"Is n't there anything we 'd like that would discipline our minds?" queried Juliet.

"I fear not," replied the old man, who lacked the diplomacy necessary to deal with the twins. Shortly after that he had died with so little warning that he had only time to make out a check in their favour for the balance entrusted to him. The twins had held high carnival until the money was almost gone. The bequest from the Australian uncle had reached them just in time, so, with thankful hearts, they celebrated and had done so annually ever since.

Untrammelled by convention and restraint, they thrived like weeds in their ancestral domicile, which was now sadly in need of repair. Occasionally some daring prank set the neighbourhood by the ears, but, for the most part, the twins behaved very well and attended strictly to their own affairs. They ate when they were

Bohemia

hungry, slept when they were sleepy, and, if they desired to sit up until four in the morning, reading, they did so. A woman who had a key to the back door came in every morning, at an uncertain hour, to wash the dishes, sweep, dust, and to make the beds if they chanced to be unoccupied.

As Romeo had said, the chimney had blown down and several loose bricks lay upon the roof. They had a small vegetable garden, fenced in, and an itinerant gardener looked after it, in Summer, but they had no flowers, because they maintained a large herd of stray dogs, mostly mongrels, that would have had no home had it not been for the hospitable twins. Romeo bought the choicest cuts of beef for them and fed them himself. Occasionally they added another to their collection and, at the last census, had nineteen.

Their house would have delighted Madame Bernard—it was so eminently harmonious and suitable. The ragged carpets showed the floor in many places, and there were no curtains at any of the windows. Romeo cherished a masculine distaste for curtains and Juliet did not trouble herself to oppose him. The furniture was old and most of it was broken. The large easy chair in the sitting room was almost disembowelled, and springs showed through the sofa, except in the middle, where there was a cavernous depression. Several really fine paintings

Getting Tea

adorned the walls, and the dingy mantel was glorified by exquisite bits of Cloisonné and iridescent glass, for which Juliet had a pronounced fancy.

"Set the table, will you, Romie?" called Juliet, tying a large blue gingham apron over her sweater. "I 'm almost starved."

"So 'm I, but I 've got to feed the dogs first."

"Let 'em wait," pleaded Juliet. "Please do!"

"Don't be so selfish! They 're worse off than we are, for they have n't even had tea."

While the pack fought, outside, for rib bones and raw steak, Juliet opened a can of salmon, fried some potatoes, put a clean spoon into a jar of jam, and cut a loaf of bread into thick slices. When Romeo came in, he set the table, made coffee, and opened a can of condensed milk. They disdained to wash dishes, but cleared off the table, after supper, lighted the lamp, and talked automobile until almost midnight.

In less than an hour, Romeo had completed the plans for remodelling the barn. They had no horse, but as a few bits of harness remained from the last equine incumbent, they usually alluded to the barn as "the bridle chamber."

"We 'll have to name the barn again," mused Juliet, "and we can name the automobile, too."

"The Yellow Peril"

"Wait until we get it. What colour shall we have?"

"They're usually red or black, are n't they?" she asked, doubtfully.

"I guess so. We want ours different, don't we?"

"Sure. We want something that nobody ever had before—something bright and cheerful. Oh, Romie," she continued, jumping up and down in excitement, "let's have it bright yellow and call it 'The Yellow Peril'!"

Her twin offered her a friendly hand. "Jule," he said solemnly, "you're a genius!"

"We'll have brown leather inside, and get brown clothes to match. Brown hats with yellow bands on 'em—won't it be perfectly scrumptious?"

"Scrumptious is no word for it. Shall we have two seats or four?"

"Four, of course. A two-seated automobile looks terribly selfish."

"Stingy, too," murmured Romeo, "and we can afford the best."

"Do you know," Juliet suggested, after deep thought, "I think it would be nice of us if we waited to take our first ride until we celebrate for Uncle?"

"It would," admitted Romeo, gloomily, "but it's such a long time to wait."

"We can learn to run it here in the yard—there's plenty of room. And on the thirtieth

of June, we 'll take our first real ride in it. Be a sport, Romie," she urged, as he maintained an unhappy silence.

"All right—I will," he said, grudgingly. "But I hope Uncle appreciates what we 're doing for him."

"That 's settled, then," she responded, cheerfully. "Then, on our second ride, we'll take somebody with us. Who shall we invite?"

"Ought n't she to go with us the first time?"

"She? Who 's 'she'?"

"Miss Ross—Isabel. She suggested it, you know. We might not have thought of it for years."

Juliet pondered. "I don't believe she ought to go the first time, because the day that Uncle died does n 't mean anything to her, and it 's everything to us. But we 'll take her on the second trip. Shall I write to her now and invite her?"

"I don't believe," Romeo responded, dryly, "that I 'd stop to write an invitation to somebody to go out four months from now in an automobile that is n't bought yet."

"But it 's as good as bought," objected Juliet, "because our minds are made up. We may forget to ask her."

"Put it on the slate," suggested Romeo.

In the hall, near the door, was a large slate suspended by a wire. The pencil was tied to it. Here they put down vagrant memoranda

Good-Night

and things they planned to acquire in the near future.

Juliet observed that there was only one entry on the slate: "Military hair brushes for R." Underneath she wrote: "Yellow automobile, four-seated. Name it 'The Yellow Peril.' Brown leather inside. Get brown clothes to match and trim with yellow. First ride, June thirtieth, for Uncle. Second ride, July first, for ourselves. Invite Isabel Ross."

"Anything else?" she asked, after reading it aloud.

"Dog biscuit," yawned Romeo. "They 're eating too much meat."

It was very late when they went up-stairs. Their rooms were across the hall from each other and they slept with the doors open. The attic had been made into a gymnasium, where they exercised and hardened their muscles when the weather kept them indoors. A trapeze had been recently put up, and Juliet was learning to swing by her feet.

She lifted her face up to his and received a brotherly peck on the lips. "Good-night, Jule."

"Good-night, Romie. Pleasant dreams."

It was really morning, but there was no clock to tell them so, for the timepieces in the Crosby mansion were seldom wound.

"Say," called Romeo.

"What?"

"What do you think of her?"

"Who?"

"Miss—you know. Isabel."

"Oh, I don't know," responded Juliet, sleepily. "I guess she 's kind of a sissy-girl."

What Do You Think of Her?

V

An Afternoon Call

Riches and Riches

"AUNT FRANCESCA," asked Isabel, "is Colonel Kent rich?"

"Very," responded Madame. She had a fine damask napkin stretched upon embroidery hoops and was darning it with the most exquisite of stitches.

"Then why don't they live in a better house and have more servants? That place is old and musty."

"Perhaps they like to live there, and, again, perhaps they have n't enough money to change. Besides, that has been Colonel Kent's home ever since he was married. Allison was born there."

Isabel fidgeted in her chair. "If they 're very rich, I should think they 'd have enough money to enable them to move into a better house."

"Oh," replied Madame, carefully cutting her thread on the underside, "I was n't thinking of money when I spoke. I don't know any-

The Concert Tour

thing about their private affairs. But Colonel Kent has courage, sincerity, an old-fashioned standard of honour, many friends, and a son who is a great artist."

The girl was silent, for intangible riches did not appeal to her strongly.

"Allison is like him in many ways," Madame was saying. "He is like his mother, too."

"When is he going away?"

"In September or October, I suppose—the beginning of the season."

"Is he going to play everywhere?"

"Everywhere of any importance."

"Perhaps," mused Isabel, "he will make a great deal of money himself."

"Perhaps," Madame responded, absently. "I do hope he will be successful." She had almost maternal pride in her foster son.

"Is Cousin Rose going, too?"

"Going where? What do you mean, dear?"

"Why, nothing. Only I heard him ask her if she would go with him on his concert tour and play his accompaniments, providing you or the Colonel went along for chaperone, and Cousin Rose laughed and said she did n't need a chaperone—that she was old enough to make it quite respectable."

"And—" suggested Madame.

"Allison laughed, too, and said: 'Nonsense!'"

"If they are going," said Madame, half to

Perfect Manners

herself, "and decide to take me along, I hope they 'll give me sufficient time to pack things decently."

"Would the Colonel go, if you went?"

"I hardly think so. It would n't be quite so proper."

"I don't understand," remarked Isabel, wrinkling her pretty brows.

"I don't either," Madame replied, confidentially. "However, I 've lived long enough to learn that the conventions of society are all in the interests of morality. If you 're conventional, you 'll be good, in a negative sense, of course."

"How do you mean, Aunt Francesca?"

"Perfect manners are diametrically opposed to crime. For instance, it is very bad form for a man to shoot a lady, or even to write another man's name on a check and cash it. It saves trouble to be conventional, for you 're not always explaining things. Most of the startling items we read in the newspapers are serious lapses from conventionality and good manners.

"The Crosbys are n't very conventional," Isabel suggested.

"No," smiled Madame, "they 're not, but their manners proceed from the most kindly and friendly instincts, consequently they 're seldom in error, essentially."

"They have lots of money, have n't they?"

"I have sometimes thought that the Crosbys had more than their age and social training fitted them to use wisely, but I 've never known them to go far astray. They 've done foolish things, but I 've never known either to do a wrong or selfish thing. Money is a terrible test of character, but I think the twins will survive it."

The Finest Gift

"I suppose they 've done lots of funny things with it."

Madame's eyes danced and little smiles wrinkled the corners of her mouth. "On the Fourth of July, last year, they presented every orphan in the Orphans' Home with two dollars' worth of fireworks, carefully chosen. Of course the inevitable happened and the orphans managed to set fire to the home, but, after two hours of hard work, the place was saved. Some of the children were slightly injured during the celebration, but that did n't matter, because as Juliet said, they 'd had a good time, anyway, and it would give them something to talk about in years to come."

"It would have been better to spend the money on shoes, would n't it?"

"I don't know, my dear. The finest gift in the world is pleasure. Sometimes I think it 's better to feed the soul and let the body fast. There is a time in life when one brief sky-rocket can produce more joy than ten pairs of shoes."

Isabel smiled and glanced at Madame Ber-

nard's lavender satin slipper. The old lady laughed and the soft colour came into her pretty face.

"I frankly admit that I 've passed it," she said. "Better one pair of shoes than ten sky-rockets, if the shoes are the sort I like."

"Do they come often?" queried Isabel, reverting to the subject of the twins.

"Not as often as I 'd like to have them, but it does n't do to urge them. I can only keep my windows open and let the wind from the clover field blow in as it will."

"Do they live near a clover field?" inquired Isabel, perplexed.

"No, but they remind me of it—they 're so breezy and wholesome, so free and untrammelled, and, at heart, so sweet."

"I hope they 'll come again soon."

"So do I, for I don't want you to be lonely, Isabel. It was good of your mother to let you come."

"Mamma does n't care what I do," observed Isabel, placidly. "She 's always busy."

Madame Bernard checked the sharp retort that rose to her lips. What Isabel had said was quite true. Mrs. Ross was so interested in what she called "The New Thought" and "The Higher World Service" that she had neither time nor inclination for the old thought and simple service that make—and keep—a home.

From the time she could dress herself and put

Left to Her Own Devices

up her own hair, Isabel had been left much to herself. Her mother supplied her liberally with money for clothes and considered that her duty to her daughter ended there. They lived in an apartment hotel and had their coffee served in their rooms in the morning. After that, Isabel was left to her own devices, for committees and directors' meetings without number claimed her mother.

More often than not, Isabel dined alone in the big dining-room downstairs, and spent a lonely evening with a novel and a box of chocolates. On pleasant days, she amused herself by going through the shops and to the matinée. She did not make friends easily and the splendid isolation common to hotels and desert islands left her stranded, socially. She had been very glad to accept Aunt Francesca's invitation, and the mother, looking back through her years of "world service" to the quiet old house and dream-haunted garden, had thought it would be a good place for Isabel for a time, and had hoped she might not find it too dull to endure.

Madame Bernard had no patience with Mrs. Ross. When she had come for a brief holiday, fifteen years before, bringing her child with her, she had just begun to be influenced by the modern feminine unrest. Later she had definitely allied herself with those whose mission it is to emancipate Woman—with a capital W

A Passion for Clothes

—from her chains, forgetting that these are of her own forging, and anchor her to the eternal verities of earth and heaven.

A single swift stroke had freed Mrs. Ross from her own "bondage." Isabel's father had died, while her mother was out upon a lecturing tour—in a hotel, which is the most miserable place in the world to die in. The housekeeper and chambermaids had befriended Isabel until the tour came to its triumphant conclusion. Mrs. Ross had seemed to consider the whole affair a kindly and appropriate recognition of her abilities, on the part of Providence. She attempted to fit Isabel for the duties of a private secretary, but failed miserably, and, greatly to Isabel's relief, gave up the idea.

Madame Bernard had looked forward to Isabel's visit with a certain apprehension, remembering Mrs. Ross's unbecoming gowns and careless coiffures. But the girl's passion for clothes, amounting almost to a complete "reversion to type," had at once relieved and alarmed her. "If I can strike a balance for her," she had said to herself in a certain midnight musing, "I shall do very well."

As yet, however, Isabel had failed to "balance." She dressed for morning and luncheon and afternoon, and again for dinner, changing to street gowns when necessary and doing her hair in a different way for each gown. Still,

Afternoon Naps

as Rose had said, she "suited herself," for she was always immaculate, beautifully clad, and a joy to behold.

Madame Bernard greatly approved of the lovely white wool house gown Isabel was wearing. She had no fault to find with the girl's taste, but she wished to subordinate, as it were, the thing to the spirit; the temple to the purpose for which it was made.

Isabel smiled at her sweetly as she folded up her work—a little uncomprehending smile. "Are you going away now for your 'forty winks,' Aunt Francesca?"

"Yes, my dear. Can you amuse yourself for an hour or so without playing upon the piano?"

"Certainly. I did n't know that you and Cousin Rose were asleep yesterday, or I would n't have played."

"Of course not." Madame leaned over her and stroked the dark hair, waved and coiled in quite the latest fashion. "There are plenty of books and magazines in the library."

Madame went upstairs, followed at a respectful distance by Mr. Boffin, waving his plumed tail. He, too, took his afternoon nap, curled up cosily upon the silken quilt at the foot of his mistress's couch. In the room adjoining, Rose rested for an hour also, though she usually spent the time with a book.

Left to herself, Isabel walked back and forth

A Pleasing Doubt

idly, greatly allured by the forbidden piano. She looked over, carelessly, the pile of violin music Allison had left there. Some of the sheets were torn and had been pasted together, all were marked in pencil with hieroglyphics, and most of them were stamped, in purple, "Allison Kent," with a Berlin or Paris address written in below.

Isabel had met very few men, in the course of her twenty years. For this reason, possibly, she remembered every detail of the two weeks she had spent at Aunt Francesca's and the hours with Allison, on the veranda, when he chose to amuse himself with the pretty, credulous child. It seemed odd to have him coming to the house again, though, unless he came to dinner, he usually spent the time playing, to Rose's accompaniment. She had not seen him alone.

She surveyed herself in the long, gilt-framed mirror, and was well pleased with the image of youth and beauty the mirror gave back. The bell rang and she pinned up a stray lock carefully. It was probably someone to see Aunt Francesca, but there was a pleasing doubt. It might be the twins, though she had not returned their call.

Presently Allison came in, his cheeks glowing from his long walk in the cold. "Silver Girl," he smiled, "where are the spangles, and are you alone?"

Allison Drops In

"The spangles are upstairs waiting for candlelight," answered Isabel, as he took her small, cool hand, "and I 'm very much alone—or was."

"Where are the others?"

"Taking naps."

"I hope I have n't tired Rose out," said Allison, offering Isabel a chair. He had unconsciously dropped the prefix of "Cousin." "We 've been working hard lately."

"Is she going with you on your tour?"

"I don't know. I wish she could go, but I have n't the heart to drag father or Aunt Francesca along with us, and otherwise, it would be—well, unconventional, you know. The conventions make me dead tired," he added, with evident sincerity.

"And yet," said Isabel, looking into the fire, "they are all in the interests of morality. If you 're conventional, you 'll be good, negatively. It is n't good manners for a man to shoot a lady or to sign a check with another man's name and get it cashed. If you 're conventional, you 're not always explaining things."

"Very true," laughed Allison, "but sometimes "the greatest good for the greatest number bears heavily upon the few."

"Of course," Isabel agreed, after a moment's pause. "Your friends, the Crosby twins, have called," she continued.

Agreeably Surprised

"Really?" Allison asked, with interest. "How do you like them?"

"I wish they'd come often," she smiled. "They remind me of a field of red clover, they're so breezy and so wholesome."

"I must hunt 'em up," he returned, absently. "They used to be regular little devils. It's a shame for them to have all that money."

"Why?"

"Because they'll waste it. They don't know how to use it."

"Perhaps they do, in a way. One Fourth of July they gave every orphan in the Orphans' Home two dollars' worth of fireworks. Anybody else would have wasted the money on shoes, or hats."

"I see you haven't grown up. Would you rather have fireworks than clothes?"

"There is a time in life when one sky-rocket can give more pleasure than a pair of shoes, and the gift of pleasure is the finest gift in the world."

Allison was agreeably surprised, for hitherto Isabel's conversation had consisted mainly of monosyllables and platitudes, or the hesitating echo of someone's else opinion. Now he perceived that it was shyness; that Isabel had a mind of her own, and an unusual mind, at that. He looked at her quickly and the colour bloomed upon her pale, cold face.

"Tell me, little playmate, what have the

Loneliness and Loyalty

years done for you since you went out and pulled up the rose bushes to find the scent bottles?"

"Nothing," she answered, not knowing what else to say.

"Still looking for the unattainable?"

"Yes, if you like to put it that way."

"Where 's your mother?"

"Out lecturing."

"What about?"

"The Bloodless Revolution, or the Gradual Emancipation of Woman," she repeated, parrot-like.

"Her work must keep her away from home a great deal," he ventured, after a pause.

"Yes. I seldom see her."

"You must be lonely."

She turned her dark eyes to his. "I live in a hotel," she said.

In the simple answer, Allison saw an unmeasured loneliness, coupled with a certain loyalty to her mother. He changed the subject.

"You like it here, don't you?"

"Yes, indeed. Aunt Francesca is lovely and so is Cousin Rose. I wish," she went on, with a little sigh as she glanced about the comfortable room, "that I could always stay here." The child-like appeal in her tone set Allison's heart to beating a little faster.

"I wish you could," he said. Remorse-

Only a Child

fully, he remembered the long hours he had spent with Rose at the piano, happily oblivious of Isabel.

"Are you fond of music?" he asked.

"Yes, indeed! I always sit outside and listen when you and Cousin Rose play."

"Come in whenever you want to," he responded, warmly.

"Won't I be in the way? Won't I be a bother?"

"I should say not. How could you be?"

"Then," Isabel smiled, "I 'll come sometimes, if I may. It 's the only pleasure I have."

"That 's too bad. Sometime we 'll go into town to the theatre, just you and I. Would you like to go?"

"I 'd love to," she answered, eagerly.

The clock ticked industriously, the fire crackled merrily upon the hearth, and the wind howled outside. In the quiet room, Allison sat and studied Isabel, with the firelight shining upon her face and her white gown. She seemed much younger than her years.

"You 're only a child," he said, aloud; "a little, helpless child."

"How long do you think it will be before I 'm grown up?"

"I don't want you to grow up. I can remember now just how you looked the day I told you about the scent bottles. You had on a pink dress, with a sash to match, pink

stockings, little white shoes with black buttons, and the most fetching white sunbonnet. Your hair was falling in curls all round your face and it was such a warm day that the curls clung to your neck and annoyed you. You toddled over to me and said: 'Allison, please fix my 's turls.' Don't you remember?"

She smiled and said she had forgotten. "But," she added, truthfully, "I 've often wondered how I looked when I was dressed up."

"Then," he continued, "I told you how the scent bottles grew on the roots of the rose bushes, and, after I went home, you went and pulled up as many as you could. Aunt Francesca was very angry with me."

"Yes, I remember that. I felt as though you were being punished for my sins. It was years afterward that I saw I 'd been sufficiently punished myself. Look!"

She leaned toward him and showed him a narrow white line on the soft flesh between her forefinger and her thumb, extending back over her hand.

"A thorn," she said. "I shall carry the scar to my dying day."

With a little catch in his throat, Allison caught the little hand and pressed it to his lips. "Forgive me!" he said.

VI

The Light on the Altar

Joy in Work

COLONEL KENT had gone away on a short business trip and Allison was spending his evenings, which otherwise would have been lonely, at Madame Bernard's. After talking for a time with Aunt Francesca and Isabel, it seemed natural for him to take up his violin and suggest, if only by a half-humorous glance, that Rose should go to the piano.

Sometimes they played for their own pleasure and sometimes worked for their own benefit. Neither Madame nor Isabel minded hearing the same thing a dozen times or more in the course of an evening, for, as Madame said, with a twinkle in her blue eyes, it made "a pleasant noise," and Isabel did not trouble herself to listen.

Both Rose and Allison were among the fortunate ones who find joy in work. Rose was so keenly interested in her music that she took no count of the hours spent at the piano, and Allison fully appreciated her. It had been

Unfolding of the Rose

a most pleasant surprise for him to find a good accompanist so near home.

The discouraging emptiness of life had mysteriously vanished for Rose. Her restlessness disappeared as though by magic and her indefinite hunger had been, in some way, appeased. She had unconsciously emerged from one state into another, as the tiny dwellers of the sea cast off their shells. She had a sense of freedom and a large vision, as of dissonances resolved into harmony.

Clothes, also, which, as Madame had said, are "supposed to please and satisfy women," had taken to themselves a new significance. Rose had made herself take heed of her clothes, but she had never had much real interest. Now she was glad of the time she had spent in planning her gowns, merely with a view to pleasing Aunt Francesca.

To-night, she wore a clinging gown of deep green velvet, with a spray of green leaves in her hair. Her only ornament was a pin of jade, in an Oriental setting. Allison looked at her admiringly.

"There 's something about you," he said, "that I don't know just how to express. I have no words for it, but, in some way, you seem to live up to your name."

"How so?" Rose asked, demurely.

"Well, I 've never seen you wear anything that a rose might not wear. I 've seen you in

Living Up to Her Name

red and green and yellow and pink and white, but never in blue or purple, or any of those soft-coloured things that Aunt Francesca wears."

"That only means," answered Rose, flushing, "that blue and grey and tan and lavender are n't becoming to me."

"That is n't it," Allison insisted, "for you 'd be lovely in anything. You 're living up to your name."

"Go on," Rose suggested mischievously. "This is getting interesting."

"You need n't laugh. I assure you that men know more about those things than they 're usually given credit for. Your jewels fit in with the whole idea, too. That jade pin, for instance, and your tourmaline necklace, and your ruby ring, and the topazes you wear with yellow, and the faint scent of roses that always hangs about you."

"What else?" she smiled.

"Well, I had a note from you the other day. It was fragrant with rose petals and the conventionalised rose, in gold and white, that was stamped in place of a monogram, did n't escape me. Besides, here 's this."

He took from his pocket a handkerchief of sheerest linen, delicately hemstitched. In one corner was embroidered a rose, in palest shades of pink and green. The delicate, elusive scent filled the room as he shook it out.

"What's in a Name?"

"There," he continued, with a laugh. "I found it in my violin case the other day. I don't know how it came there, but it was much the same as finding a rose twined about the strings."

Aunt Francesca was on the other side of the room, by the fire. Her face, in the firelight, was as delicate as a bit of carved ivory. Her thoughts were far away—one could see that. Isabel sat near her, apparently absorbed in a book, but, in reality, listening to every word.

"I wish," Allison was saying, "that people knew how to live up to themselves. That 's an awkward phrase, but I don't know of anything better. Even their names don't fit 'em, and they get nicknames."

" 'Father calls me William,' " murmured Rose.

" 'And Mother calls me Will,' " Allison went on. "That 's it, exactly. See how the 'Margarets' are adjusted to themselves by their friends. Some are 'Margie' and more of 'em are 'Peggy.' A 'Margaret' who is allowed to wear her full name is very rare."

"I 'm glad my name can 't be changed, easily," she said, thoughtfully.

"It could be 'Rosie,' with an 'ie,' and if you were that sort, it would be. Take Aunt Francesca, for instance. She might be 'Frances' or 'Fanny' or even 'Fran,' but her name suits

Names That Fit

her, so she gets the full benefit of it, every time."

Madame turned away from the fire, with the air of one who has been away upon a long journey. "Did I hear my name? Did someone speak to me?"

"Only of you," Allison explained. "We were talking of names and nicknames and saying that yours suited you."

"If it did n't," observed Madame Bernard, "I 'd change it. When we get civilised, I believe children will go by number until they get old enough to choose their own names. Fancy a squirming little imp with a terrible temper being saddled with the name of 'William,' by authority of Church and State. Except to his doting parents, he 'll never be anything but 'Bill.'"

"Does my name fit me?" queried Isabel, much interested.

"It would," said Allison, "if you were n't quite so tall. Does my name fit me?"

He spoke to Madame Bernard but he looked at Rose. It was the older woman who answered him. "Yes, of course it does. How dare you ask me that when I named you myself?"

"I 'd forgotten," Allison laughed. "I can't remember quite that far back."

They began to play once more and Isabel, pleading a headache, said good-night. She

Plans for Isabel

made her farewells very prettily and there was a moment's silence after the door closed.

"I 'm afraid," said Madame, "that our little girl is lonely. Allison, can't you bestir yourself and find some young men to call upon her? I can't think of anybody but the Crosby twins."

"What's the matter with me?" inquired Allison, lightly. "Am I not calling? And behold, I give her a headache and she goes to bed."

"You 're not exactly in her phase of youth," Madame objected. "She 's my guest and she has to be entertained."

"I 'm willing to do my share. I 'll take her into town to the theatre some night, and to supper afterward, in the most brilliantly lighted place I can find."

"That 's very nice of you," responded Rose, with a look of friendly appreciation. "I know she would enjoy the bright lights."

"We all do, in certain moods," he said. "Are you ready now?"

The voice of the violin rose to heights of ecstasy, sustained by full chords in the accompaniment. Mingled with the joy of it, like a breath of sadness and longing, was a theme in minor, full of question and heartbreak; of appeal that was almost prayer. And over it all, as always, hovering like some far light, was the call to which Rose answered. Dumbly, she knew that she must always answer it,

Old Dreams

though she were dead and the violin itself mingled with her dust.

Madame Bernard, still seated by the fire, stirred uneasily. Something had come into her house that vaguely troubled her, because she had no part in it. The air throbbed with something vital, keen, alive; the room trembled as from invisible wings imprisoned.

Old dreams and memories came back with a rush, and the little old lady sitting in the half light looked strangely broken and frail. The sound of marching and the steady beat of a drum vibrated through her consciousness and the singing violin was faint and far. She saw again the dusty street, where the blue column went forward with her Captain at the head, his face stern and cold, grimly set to some high Purpose that meant only anguish for her. The picture above the mantel, seen dimly through a mist, typified, to her, the ways of men and women since the world began—the young knight riding forward in his quest for the Grail, already forgetting what lay behind, while the woman knelt, waiting, waiting, waiting, as women always have and always must.

At last the music reached its end in a low chord that was at once a question and a call. Madame rose, about to say good-night, and go up-stairs where she might be alone. On the instant she paused. Her heart waited almost imperceptibly, then resumed its beat.

An Illumined Face

Still holding the violin, Allison was looking at Rose. Subconsciously, Madame noted his tall straight figure, his broad well-set shoulders, his boyish face, and his big brown eyes. But Rose had illumined as from some inward light; her lovely face was transfigured into a beauty beyond all words.

Francesca slipped out without speaking and went, unheard, to her own room. She felt guilty because she had discerned something of which Rose herself was as yet entirely unconscious. With the instinctive sex-loyalty that distinguishes fine women from the other sort, Madame hoped that Allison did not know.

"And so," she said to herself, "Love has come back to my house, after many years of absence. I wonder if he cares? He must, oh, he must!" Francesca had no selfish thought of her own loneliness, if her Rose should go away. Though her own heart was forever in the keeping of a distant grave, she could still be glad of another's joy.

Rose turned away from the piano and Allison put his violin into the case. "It's late," he said, regretfully, "and you must be tired."

"Perhaps I am, but I don't know it."

"You respond so fully to the music that it is a great pleasure to play with you. I wish I could always have you as my accompanist."

"I do, too," murmured Rose, turning her face away. The deep colour mounted to the

Why?

roots of her hair and he studied her impersonally, as he would have studied any other lovely thing.

"Why?" he began, then laughed.

"Why what?" asked Rose, quickly.

"I was about to ask you a very foolish question."

"Don't hesitate," she said. "Most questions are foolish."

"This is worse—it's idiotic. I was going to ask you why you had n't married."

With a sharp stab at the heart, Rose noted the past tense. "Why have n't you?" she queried, forcing a smile.

"There is only one answer to that question, and yet people keep on asking it. They might as well ask why you don't buy an automobile."

"Well?" continued Rose, inquiringly.

"Because 'the not impossible she,' or 'he,' has n't come, that's all."

"Perhaps only one knows," she suggested.

"No," replied Allison, "in any true mating, they both know—they must."

There was a long pause. A smouldering log, in the fireplace, broke and fell into the embers. The dying flame took new life and the warm glow filled the room.

"Is that why people don't buy automobiles?" queried Rose, chiefly because she did not know what else to say.

"The answer to that is that they do."

Life's Wonder

"Sounds as if you might have taken it from *Alice in Wonderland*," she commented. "Maybe they 've had to give each other up," she concluded, enigmatically.

"People who will give each other up should be obliged to do it," he returned. "May I leave my violin here? I 'll be coming again so soon."

"Surely. I hope you will."

"Good-night." He took her hand for a moment, in his warm, steady clasp, and subtly, Rose answered to the man — not the violin. She was deathly white when the door closed, and she trembled all the way up-stairs.

When she saw herself in the mirror, she was startled, for, in her ghostly pallor, her deep eyes burned like stars. She knew, now. The woman who had so hungered for Life had suddenly come face to face with its utmost wonder; its highest gift of joy—or pain.

The heart of a man is divided into many compartments, mostly isolated. Sometimes there is a door between two of them, or even three may be joined, but usually, each one is complete in itself. Within the different chambers his soul sojourns as it will, since immeasurably beyond woman, he possesses the power of detachment, of intermittence.

The Heart of a Woman

Once in a lifetime, possibly, under the influence of some sweeping passion, all the doors are flung wide and the one beloved woman may enter in. Yet she is wise, with the wisdom of the Sphinx, if she refuses to go. Let her say to him: "Close all these doors, except that which bears my name. In that chamber and in that alone, we shall dwell together." For, with these words, the memories housed in the other chambers crumble to dust and ashes, blown only by vagrant winds of Fate.

In the heart of a woman there are few chambers and still fewer doors. Instead of business-like compartments, neatly labelled, there are long, labyrinthine passages, all opening into one another and inextricably bound together. To shut out one, or even part of one, requires the building of a wall, but it takes a long time and the barrier is never firm.

At a single strain of music, the scent of a flower, or even one glimpse of a path of moonlight lying fair upon a Summer sea, the barriers crumble and fall. Through the long corridors the ghosts of the past walk unforbidden, hindered only by broken promises, dead hopes, and dream-dust.

Even while the petals of long-dead roses rustle through the winding passages, where the windows are hung with cobwebs, greyed at last from iridescence to despairing shadows, a barrier may fall at the sound of a talismanic

The Secret Chamber

name, for the hands of women are small and slow to build and the hearts of women are tender beyond all words.

Hidden in the centre of the labyrinth is one small secret chamber, and the door may open only at the touch of one other hand. The woman herself may go into it for peace and sanctuary, when the world goes wrong, but always alone, until the great day comes when two may enter it together.

As Theseus carried the thread of Ariadne through the labyrinth of Crete, there are many who attempt to find the secret chamber, but vainly, for the thread will always break in the wrong heart.

When the door is opened, at last, by the one who has made his way through the devious passages, there is so little to be seen that sometimes even the man himself laughs the woman to scorn and despoils her of her few treasures.

The secret chamber is only a bare, white room, where is erected the high altar of her soul, served through life, by her own faith. Upon the altar burns steadfastly the one light, waiting for him who at last has come and consecrated in his name. The door of the sanctuary is rock-ribbed and heavy, and he who has not the key may beat and call in vain, while within, unheeding, the woman guards her light.

Pitifully often the man does not care.

The Door Opened

Sometimes he does not even suspect that he has been admitted into the inmost sanctuary of her heart, for there are men who may never know what sanctuary means, nor what the opening of the door has cost. But the man who is worthy will kneel at the altar for a moment, with the woman beside him, and thereafter, when the outside world has been cruel to him, he may go in sometimes, with her, to warm his hands at those divine fires and kindle his failing courage anew.

When the sanctuary is not profaned by him who has come hither, its blessedness is increased ten-fold; it takes on a certain divinity by being shared, and thereafter, they serve the light together.

And yet, through woman's eager trustfulness, the man who opens the door is not always the one divinely appointed to open it. Sometimes the light fails and the woman, weeping in the darkness, is left alone in her profaned temple, never to open its door again, or, after many years, to set another light high upon the altar, and, in the deepening shadows, pray.

So, because the door had never been opened, and because she knew the man had come at last who might enter the sanctuary with her, Rose lifted her ever-burning light that night to the high altar of her soul, and set herself to wait until he should find his way there.

VII

Father and Son

Looking Back

THE house seemed very quiet, though steadily, from a distant upper room, came the sound of a violin. For more than an hour, Allison had worked continuously at one difficult phrase. Colonel Kent smiled whimsically as he sat in the library, thinking that, by this time, he could almost play it himself.

Looking back over the thirty years, he could see where he had made mistakes in moulding the human clay entrusted to his care, yet, in the end, the mistakes had not mattered. Back in the beginning, he had formulated certain cherished ideals for his son, and had worked steadily toward them, unmindful of occasional difficulties and even failures.

Against his own judgment, he had yielded to Francesca in the choice of the boy's career. "Look at his hands," she had said. "You could n't put hands like his at work in an office. If he is n't meant for music, we 'll find it out soon enough."

Like a River

But Allison had gone on, happily, along the chosen path, with never a question or doubt of his ultimate success. Just now, the Colonel was deeply grateful to Francesca, for the years abroad had been pleasant ones, and would have been wholly impossible had Allison been working in an office.

With a sigh, he began to pace back and forth through the hall, his hands in his pockets, and his grey head bowed. Before him was his own portrait, in uniform, his hand upon his sword. The sword itself, hanging in a corner of the hall, was dull and lifeless now. He had a curious sense that his work was done.

The tiny stream, rising from some cool pool among the mountains, is not unlike man's own beginning, for, at first, it gives no hint of its boundless possibilities. Grown to a river, taking to itself the water from a thousand secret channels, it leaps down the mountain, heedless of rocky barriers, with all the joy of lusty youth.

The river itself portrays humanity precisely, with its tortuous windings, its accumulation of driftwood, its unsuspected depths, and its crystalline shallows, singing in the Summer sun. Barriers may be built across its path, but they bring only power, as the conquering of an obstacle is always sure to do. Sometimes when the rocks and stone-clad hills loom large ahead, and eternity itself would be needed to carve a

Just Thinking

passage, there is an easy way around. The discovery of it makes the river sing with gladness and turns the murmurous deeps to living water, bright with ripples and foam.

Ultimately, too, in spite of rocks and driftwood, of endless seeking for a path, of tempestuous nights and days of ice and snow, man and the river reach the eternal sea, to be merged forever with the Everlasting.

Upstairs the music ceased. A door opened, then closed, and presently Allison came down, rubbing his hands. "It's a little cool up there," he said, "and yet, by the calendar, it's Spring. I wish this climate could be averaged up."

"Even then, we would n't be satisfied," the Colonel returned. "Who wants all his days to be alike?"

"Nobody. Still, it's a bit trying to freeze your nose one day and be obliged to keep all the windows open the next."

There was a long pause. The Colonel tapped his fingers restlessly upon the library table. Allison went over to the open fire and stood with his back to it, clasping his hands behind him. "What have you been doing all the morning, Dad?"

"Nothing. Just sitting here, thinking."

"Pretty hopeless occupation unless you have something in particular to think about."

Chatting Together

"It 's better to have nothing to think about than to be obliged to think of something unpleasant, is n't it?"

"I don't know," Allison responded, smothering a yawn. "Almost anything is better than being bored."

"You 're not bored, are you?" asked the Colonel, quickly.

"Far from it, but I have my work. I was thinking of you."

"I can work, too," the Colonel replied. "I think as soon as the ground thaws out, I 'll make a garden. A floral catalogue came yesterday and the pictures are very inspiring."

"Does it give any directions for distinguishing between the flowers and weeds?"

"No," laughed the Colonel, "but I 've thought of trying the ingenious plan of the man who pulled up the plants and carefully watered the weeds, expecting the usual contrary results."

Luncheon was announced and they went out together, shivering at the change in temperature between the library and the dining-room, where there would be no cheerful open fire until the dinner hour.

"What are you going to do this afternoon?" queried the Colonel.

"Why, work, I suppose—at least until I get too tired to work any more."

"You seem to believe in an eight-hour day."

Silence Everywhere

Something in the tone gave Allison an inkling of the fact that his father was lonely and restless in the big house. When they were abroad, he had managed to occupy himself pleasantly while Allison was busy, and, for the first time, the young man wondered whether it had been wise to come back.

The loneliness of the great rooms was evident, if one looked for it, and the silence was literally to be felt, everywhere. It is difficult for two people to be happy in a large house; they need the cosiness established by walls not too far apart, ceilings not too high, and the necessary furniture not too widely separated. A single row of books, within easy reach, may hint of companionship not possible to the great bookcase across a large room.

"I think," said Allison, "that perhaps this house is too large for us. Why should we need fifteen rooms?"

"We don't, but what's the use of moving again just now, when we're all settled."

"It's no trouble to move," returned the young man.

"It might be, if we did it ourselves. I fancy that Miss Rose could give us a few pointers on the subject of opening an old house."

"There may be something in that," admitted Allison. "What charming neighbours they are!" he added, in a burst of enthusiasm.

"Madame Bernard," replied the Colonel,

Crossing the Line

with emphasis, "is one of the finest women I have ever had the good fortune to meet. Miss Rose is like her, but I have known only one other of the same sort."

"And the other was——"

"Your mother."

The Colonel pushed back his plate and went to the window. Beyond the mountains, somewhere in "God's acre," was the little sunken grave still enfolding a handful of sacred dust. With a sudden throb of pain, Allison realised, for the first time in his life, that his father was an old man. The fine, strong face, outlined clearly by the pitiless afternoon sun, was deeply lined; the broad shoulders were stooped a little, and the serene eyes dimned as though by mist. In the moment he seemed to have crossed the dividing line between maturity and age.

Allison was about to suggest that they take a walk after luncheon, having Madame Bernard's household in mind as the ultimate object, but, before he could speak, the Colonel had turned away from the window.

"Some day you 'll marry, lad," he said, in a strange tone.

Allison smiled and shrugged his shoulders doubtfully.

"And then," the Colonel continued, with a little catch in his voice, "the house will be none too large for two—for you two."

Very rarely, and for a moment only, Allison

looked like his mother. For an instant she lived again in her son's eyes, then vanished.

A Good Idea

"Dad," he said, gently, "I 'm sure you would n't desert me even if I did marry. You 've stood by me too long."

The stooped shoulders straightened and the Colonel smiled. "Do you mean that—if you married, you 'd still—want me?"

"Most assuredly."

"She would n't."

"If she did n't," returned Allison, lightly, "she would n't get me. Not that I 'm any prize to be wrangled over by the fair sex, individually or collectively, but you and I stand together, Dad, and don't you forget it."

The Colonel cleared his throat, tried to speak, then stopped abruptly. "I have been thinking," he continued, with a swift change of mood and subject, "that we might manage a dinner party. We 're much indebted to Madame Bernard."

"Good idea! I don't know what sort of party it would prove to be, but, if we did our best, it would be all right with them. Anyhow, Aunt Francesca would give an air to it."

"So would the others, Miss Rose especially."

"I wonder why Aunt Francesca did n't marry again," mused Allison.

"Because her heart is deep enough to hold a grave."

"You knew her husband, did n't you?"

Only a Kid

"He was my best friend," answered the Colonel, a little sadly. "How the years separate and destroy, and blot out the things that count for the most!"

"I wonder how she happened to be named 'Francesca.' It is n't an American name."

"She was n't. Her name was 'Mary Frances,' and he changed it to 'Marie Francesca.' So she has been 'Marie Francesca' ever since, though she never uses the 'Marie.' That was his name for her."

"The change suits her someway. Queer idea she has about names fitting people, and yet it is n't so queer, either, when you come to think of it. Rose might have been named Abigail or Jerusha, yet I believe people would have found out she was like a rose and called her by her proper name."

Colonel Kent flashed a quick glance at him, but the expression of his face had not changed. "And Isabel?" he queried, lightly.

"Isabel 's only a kid and it does n't matter so much whether things fit her or not. I 've promised to take her to the theatre," he continued, irrelevantly, "because Aunt Francesca wants her guest to be amused. I 'm also commissioned to find some youths about twenty and trot 'em round for Isabel's inspection. Do you know of anybody?"

"I 've seen only one who might do. There 's a lanky boy with unruly hair and an expansive

The Twins

smile whom I 've seen at the post-office a time or two. He usually has a girl with him, but she may be his sister. They look astonishingly alike."

"Bet it 's the Crosby twins. I 'd like to see the little devils, if they 've grown up."

"They 're grown up, whoever they are. The boy is almost as tall as I am and his sister does n't lack much of it."

"I must hunt 'em up. They 've already called on Isabel, and perhaps, when she returns the call, she 'll take me along."

"Who brought them up?" asked the Colonel idly.

"They 've brought themselves up, for the last five or six years, and I 'm of the opinion that they 've always done it."

"Let 's invite them to the dinner party."

Allison's eyes danced at the suggestion. "All right, but we 'll have to see 'em first. They may not want to come."

"I 've often wondered," mused the Colonel, "why it is so much more pleasant to entertain than it is to be entertained. I 'd rather have a guest any day than to be one."

"And yet," returned Allison, "if you are a guest, you can get away any time you want to, within reasonable limits. If you 're entertaining, you 've got to keep it going until they all want to go."

Quite Himself Again

"In that case, it might be better for us if we went to Crosbys'."

"We can do that, too. I think it would be fun, though, to have 'em here. We need another man in one sense, though not in another."

"I have frequently had occasion to observe," remarked the Colonel, "that many promising dinners are wholly spoiled by the idea that there must be an equal number of men and women. One uncongenial guest can ruin a dinner more easily than a poor salad—and that is saying a great deal."

"Your salad days are n't over yet, evidently."

"I hope not."

The hour of talk had done the Colonel a great deal of good, and he was quite himself again. Some new magazines had come in the afternoon mail and lay on the library table. He fingered the paper knife absently as he tore off the outer wrappings and threw them into the fire.

"I believe I 'll go up and work for a couple of hours," said Allison, "and then we 'll go out for a walk."

"All right, lad. I 'll be ready."

Even after the strains of the violin sounded faintly from upstairs, accompanied by a rhythmic tread as Allison walked to and fro, Colonel Kent did not begin to cut the leaves.

Links with the Past

Instead, he sat gazing into the fire, thinking. Quite unconsciously, for years, he had been carrying a heavy burden—the fear that Allison would marry and that his marriage would bring separation. Now he was greatly reassured. "And yet," he thought, "there 's no telling what a woman may do."

The sense that his work was done still haunted him, and, resolutely, he tried to push it aside. "While there 's life, there 's work," he said to himself. He knew, however, as he had not known before, that Allison was past the need of his father, except for companionship.

The old house seemed familiar, yet as though it belonged to another life. He remembered the building of it, when, with a girl's golden head upon his shoulder, they had studied plans together far into the night. As though it were yesterday, their delight at the real beginning came back. There was another radiant hour, when the rough flooring for the first story was laid, and, with bare scantlings reared, skeleton-like, all around them, they actually went into their own house.

One by one, through the vanished years, he sought out the links that bound him to the past. The day the bride came home from the honeymoon, and knelt, with him, upon the hearthstone, to light their first fire together; the day she came to him, smiling, to whisper to him

The Magic of Years

the secret that lay beneath her heart; the long waiting, half fearful and half sweet, then the hours of terror that made an eternity of a night, then the dawn, that brought the ultimate, unbroken peace which only God can change.

Over there, in front of the fireplace in the library, the little mother had lain in her last sleep. The heavy scent of tuberoses, the rumble of wheels, the slow sound of many feet, and the tiny, wailing cry that followed them when he and she went out of their house together for the last time—it all came back, but, mercifully, without pain.

Were it not for this divine forgetting, few of us could bear life. One can recall only the fact of suffering, never the suffering itself. When a sorrow is once healed, it leaves only a tender memory, to come back, perhaps, in many a twilight hour, with tears from which the bitterness has been distilled.

Slowly, too, by the wonderful magic of the years, unknown joys reveal themselves and stand before us, as though risen from the dead. At such and such a time, we were happy, but we did not know it. In the midst of sorrow, the joy comes back, not reproachfully, but to beckon us on, with clearer sight, to those which lie on the path beyond.

He remembered, too, that after the first sharp agony of bereavement was over; when he had learned that even Death does not deny

Love, he had seemed to enter some mysterious fellowship. Gradually, he became aware of the hidden griefs of others, and from many unsuspected sources came consolation. Even those whom he had thought hard and cold cherished some holy of holies—some sacred altar where a bruised heart had been healed and the bitterness taken away.

He had come to see that the world was full of kindness; that through the countless masks of varying personalities, all hearts beat in perfect unison, and that joy, in reality, is immortal, while pain dies in a day.

"And yet," he thought, "how strange it is that life must be nearly over, before one fully learns to live."

The fire crackled cheerily on the hearth, the sunbeams danced gaily through the old house, spending gold-dust generously in corners that were usually dark, and the uncut magazine slipped to the floor. Above, the violin sang high and clear. The Colonel leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes.

When Allison came down, he was asleep, with the peace of Heaven upon his face, and so quiet that the young man leaned over him, a little frightened, to wait for the next deep breath. Reassured, he did not wake him, but went for his walk alone.

VIII

"The Year's at the Spring"

Daybreak

OUTSIDE, in the grey darkness, the earth was soft with snow. Upon the illimitable horizon beyond the mountain peaks were straying gleams of dawn, colourless, but none the less surely a promise of daybreak.

Rose had been awake for some time, listening to the ice-clad branches that clattered with every passing breeze. A maple bough, tapping on her window as ghostly fingers might, had first aroused her from a medley of dreams.

She went to the window, shivering a little, and, while she stood there, watching the faint glow in the East, the wind changed in quality, though it was still cool. Hints of warmth and fragrance were indefinably blended with the cold, and Rose laughed as she crept back to bed, for she had chanced upon the mysterious hour when the Weaver of the Seasons changed the pattern upon the loom.

Having raised another window shade, she could see the dawn from where she lay. Tints

The Heart's Seasons

of gold and amethyst came slowly upon the grey and made the horizon delicately iridescent, like mother-of-pearl. Warm and soft from the Southland, the first wind of Spring danced merrily into Madame Frances-a's sleeping garden, thrilling all the life beneath the sod. With the first beam of sun, the ice began to drip from the imprisoned trees and every fibre of shrub and tree to quiver with aspiration, as though a clod should suddenly find a soul.

In the watcher's heart, too, had come another Spring, for once in time and tune with the outer world. The heart's seasons seldom coincide with the calendar. Who among us has not been made desolate beyond all words upon some golden day when the little creatures of the air and meadow were life incarnate, from sheer joy of living? Who among us has not come home, singing, when the streets were almost impassable with snow, or met a friend with a happy, smiling face, in the midst of a pouring rain?

The soul, too, has its own hours of Winter and Spring. Gethsemane and Calvary may come to us in the time of roses and Easter rise upon us in a December night. How shall we know, in our own agony, of another's gladness, or, on that blessed to-morrow when the struggle is over, help someone else to bear our own forgotten pain?

Awake at Last

True sympathy is possible only when the season of one soul accords with that of another, or else when memory, divinely tender, brings back a vivid, scarlet hour out of grey, forgotten days, to enable us to share, with another, his own full measure of sorrow or of joy.

Ah, but the world was awake at last! Javelin-like, across a field of melting snow, went a flash of blue wings, and in Madame Francesca's own garden a robin piped his cheery strain upon the topmost bough of a dripping tree.

The woman, too, was awake, in every fibre of body and soul. Even her finger-tips seemed sentient and alive; her heart was strangely lifted, as though by imprisoned wings. She had no doubt of the ultimate hour, when he would know also, yet, half-afraid, she shrank from it, as she would not have shrunk from pain.

Madame had once remarked that civilisation must have begun not earlier than nine in the morning, or later than noon. She had a horror of the early breakfast, when the family, cold, but clean, gathers itself around the board which only last night was festive and strives valiantly to be pleasant. It was almost an axiom with her that human, friendly conversation was not possible before nine in the morning.

So, as there was no one else to be pleased, the three women breakfasted when and where

they chose. If Rose preferred to robe herself immaculately in white linen and have her coffee in the dining-room at seven, she was at liberty to do so. If she wanted it in her own room, at ten, that also was easily managed, but this was the only "movable feast" Madame would permit. Luncheon and dinner went precisely by the clock, year in and year out.

Too happy to sleep and yearning to be outdoors, Rose dressed quietly and tiptoed down-stairs. She smiled whimsically as the heavy front door slammed behind her, wondering if it would wake the others and if they, too, would know that it was Spring.

Tips of green showed now and then where the bulbs were planted, and, down in the wild garden, when she brushed aside the snow, Rose found a blushing hepatica in full bloom. "How indiscreet," she thought, then added, to herself, "but what sublime courage it must take to blossom now!"

The plump robin, whose winter had evidently been pleasant, hopped about the garden after her, occasionally seeking shelter on the lower bough of a tree if she turned, or came too near. "Don't be afraid," she called, aloud, then laughed, as with a farewell chirp and a flutter of wings, the robin took himself beyond the reach of further conversational liberties.

Her pulses leaped with abundant life; the

A Surprise

wet road lured her eager feet. She went out, leaving the gate open, and turned toward the woods, where a flock of wild geese, breasting the chill winds far above the river, was steadily cleaving a passage to the friendly North.

When she reached the woods, where the white birches stood like shy dryads among the oaks, she heard once more the robin's flutelike call. It was answered by another, exactly upon the same notes, yet wholly different as to quality. Presently, among the trees, she caught a glimpse of a tall man, and she paused for an instant, frightened. Then her heart leaped and her cheeks burned, as she saw who it was.

"Boy!" she called, clearly. "Oh, Boy!"

Allison turned, startled, then came to her, smiling, hat in hand. "Upon my word," he said. "I didn't think there was anyone else mad enough to come out at this hour."

"Why it 's Spring! Didn't you know?"

"Yes. It came this morning just before sunrise."

"Were you awake?"

"Yes, were you?"

"Of course," she answered. "I couldn't stay in."

"Nor could I."

"The year 's at the spring,
And day 's at the morn;
Morning 's at seven;
The hill-side 's dew-pearled,"

Rose quoted. "You know the rest, don't you?"

"The rest does n't matter. 'Morning waits at the end of the world—Gypsy, come away!'"

"I 'll go," she breathed, her eyes fixed on his, "anywhere!"

"To the river, then. The last time I saw it, ice and snow had hidden it completely."

The path was narrow until they got out of the woods, so Rose went ahead. "I don't believe I fooled that robin by whistling to him," Allison continued. "He pretended I did, but I believe he was only trying to be polite."

"He was n't, if it was the same robin I saw in our garden this morning. I spoke to him most pleasantly and told him not to be afraid of me, but he disappeared with a very brief, chirpy good-bye."

"Don't hurry so," he said, as he came up beside her and assisted her over a fallen tree. "We 've got the whole day, have n't we?"

"We have all the time there is," laughed Rose. "Everybody has, for that matter."

"Have you had your breakfast?"

"No, have you?"

"Far from it. Everybody was asleep when I came out."

"Then you 'll have breakfast with me," she said, quickly.

"Thank you," he smiled, "for taking the hint."

A Question of Age

"But won't your father miss you?" she queried, with mock seriousness.

"He pays no attention whatever to my irregular habits, and I think that 's one reason why we get on so well together. It 's a wise father who knows his own child."

"Especially if it is a wise child," she replied. Her eyes were dancing with mirth, a scarlet signal burned on either cheek, and her parted lips were crimson. She seemed lovelier to him than ever before.

"Honestly, Rose, you seem to get prettier every day."

"Then," she smiled, "if I were younger, I might eventually become dangerous."

"Rose——"

"Old Rose," she interrupted. The high colour faded from her face as she spoke and left her pale.

Allison put his hand on her arm and stopped. "Rose, please don't. You 're not a day older than I am."

"Ten years," she insisted stubbornly, for women are wont to lean upon the knife that stabs them and she was in a reckless mood. "When you 're forty, I 'll be fifty."

A shadow crossed his face. "It hurts me, someway, to have you talk so. I don't know how—nor why."

In a single swift surge her colour came back. "All right," she answered, quietly, "hereafter

I 'm thirty, also. Thanking you for giving me ten more years of life, for I love it so!"

The sun was well up in the heavens when they came to the river, and the dark, rippling surface gave back the light in a thousand little dancing gleams. The ice was broken, the snow was gone, and fragments of shattered crystal went gently toward the open sea, lured by the song of the river underneath.

"It does n't look deep," remarked Rose.

"But is is, nevertheless. I nearly drowned myself here when I was a kid, trying to dive to the bottom."

"I 'm glad you did n't succeed. What a heavy blow it would have been to your father!"

"Dear old Dad," said Allison, gently. "I 'm all he has."

"And all he wants."

"It 's after eight," Allison complained, looking at his watch, "and I 'm starving."

"So am I. Likewise my skirts are wet, so we 'd better go."

When they reached Madame Bernard's, Rose ordered breakfast in the dining-room, for two, then excused herself to put on dry clothing. Allison waited before the open fire until she came down, fresh and tailor-made, in another gown and a white linen collar.

"I thought women always wore soft, fluffy things in the morning," he observed, as they sat down.

Isabel Free

"Some do—the fluffy ones, always."

"Who, for instance, are the fluffy ones?"

"Aunt Francesca for one and Isabel for another."

"How long is the kid going to stay?"

"Until she gets ready to go home, I suppose."

"I thought she had no home."

"She has n't. Poor Isabel is a martyr to the Cause of Woman."

"How so?"

"Her mother is Emancipated, with a large E, and has no time for trifles like a daughter. She devotes herself to what she calls the Higher World Service."

"So Isabel is stranded, on a desert island."

"Yes, except for us."

"How good you are!" he exclaimed, with honest admiration.

"It was Aunt Francesca," returned Rose, flushing slightly. "I had nothing to do with it. She took me from a desert island, too."

"Is Isabel emancipated?"

"Not in the sense that her mother is."

"I don't see but what she is free."

"She is. She can do exactly as she pleases and there is no one to say her nay."

"I thought all women did as they please."

"They do, in the sense that we all do as we please. If you make a sacrifice, you do it because you can get more pleasure out of making it than you would otherwise."

"You 've been reading Spencer."

"I plead guilty," she laughed.

"If it 's true," he went on, after a moment's pause, "a genuine New England conscience must be an unholy joy to its proud possessor."

"It 's unholy at all events. One lump, or two?" she asked, as the coffee was brought in.

"Two, please."

It seemed very pleasant to Allison to sit there in the warm, sunny room, with Rose opposite him, pouring his coffee. There was an air of cosiness and domestic peace about it hitherto outside his experience. For the first time he was conscious of the peculiar graciousness and sense of home that only a home-loving woman may give to a house.

"I like this," he said, as he took the steaming cup. "I 'd like to do it often."

"We 'd like to have you," she returned, hospitably.

"I thought you all had breakfast together at some fixed hour, and early at that."

"How little you know Aunt Francesca! You can have breakfast in this house in any room you choose, at any hour before noon, all the year round. Sometimes we 're all together, sometimes only two. Usually, however I 'm alone, as I seem to get up a little earlier than the others."

"I think I 'll drop in occasionally, then. It looks as if there 'd always be somebody to

Two of Her

bear me company. Perhaps I 'll bring Dad, too. He 'd like to have you pour his coffee."

There was no mistaking the admiration in Allison's eyes and Rose turned hers away. He sat with his back to the dining-room door and she, across from him, faced it squarely. For the merest fraction of a second Isabel, in a pink silk negligee, stood in the doorway, then vanished, as noiselessly as she had come. Her eyes were full of mysterious meaning that Rose was powerless to translate.

"I 'd enjoy it," Rose said quickly. "I love to pour the coffee and Aunt Francesca always lets me on the rare occasions when we breakfast together."

If her colour was a little brighter, if her voice was in a higher key, if her eyes had changed their expression, Allison did not notice it. Yet, in the instant, she had attained a certain dual consciousness—there seemed to be two of her. One was the woman of the world, well-schooled in self-control, tactful, watchful, ready to smooth any awkwardness, and, at every point, to guard her guest. The other was Primitive Woman; questioning, curious, and watchful in the sense of rivalry. She put it resolutely aside to think about later, and was very glad that Allison did not know.

She was greatly relieved when he went home, promising to return later for a few hours of work upon a difficult concerto. "We 'll do it

again," he said, laughing, as he went down the steps. "Ask Aunt Francesca to give me a meal ticket, to be used solely for breakfasts, will you?"

Rose only smiled in answer, but waved her hand to him as he went out of the gate. She stood pensively in the hall for a moment or two after she had closed the door, and would have gone up to her own room had she not heard a step at the head of the stairs.

Isabel was coming down, also fresh and tailor-made, with a white linen collar and a dashing crimson tie. Rose strolled into the library, took up a magazine, sat down, and pretended to read.

"I 'm so sorry to be late to breakfast," remarked Isabel, following her. "But perhaps it 's just as well, as I was n't invited."

"Nobody was invited," returned Rose, coolly. "I went out for an early walk, chanced to meet Mr. Kent, and he invited himself here to breakfast."

"I did n't know you were in the habit of taking early walks."

"I 'm trying to acquire the habit," answered Rose, with icy sweetness.

"It won't be hard," Isabel said, maliciously, "if they're all equally pleasant." She slammed the door as she went out, shutting Rose in the library.

For an instant Rose was angry, then her

The Perfect Hour

sense of humour triumphed and she laughed quietly until the tears came. There was no need now to meditate upon that mysterious look in the girl's eyes, for she had translated it herself.

"The idea," said Rose to herself. "That foolish little child!" She tried to recall the conversation at the breakfast table, and remembered, with regret, that they had discussed Isabel quite freely. The thought that Isabel might have been listening before she made her presence known came forward persistently, though Rose hated herself for it.

Then, with swift resolution, she put all annoying thoughts aside to dwell, happily, upon the perfect hour that nothing could ever change or spoil. She went into the hall by another door opening out of the library, thus avoiding Isabel, and sought her own room, singing to herself:

"The year 's at the spring,
And day 's at the morn,
The morning 's at seven,
The hillside 's dew-pearled,
The lark 's on the wing,
The snail 's on the thorn;
God 's in His heaven—
All 's right with the world!"

IX

A Knight-Errant

The Cause of Trouble

ANOTHER mongrel had been added to the Crosby collection, so the canine herd now numbered twenty, all in the best of health and spirits. Some unpleasantness had been caused at the breakfast table by a gentle hint from Juliet to the effect that the dog supply seemed somewhat in excess of the demand. She had added insult to injury by threatening to chloroform the next dog her brother brought home.

"Huh!" Romeo sneered, "they 're as much yours as mine. You brought home the spotted one yourself."

"That was only because the boys were teasing him. I did n't want him."

"I 've never brought home any without good reasons, and you know it. Besides, we 've got room here for forty dogs, and they 're all fenced in. They don't bother anybody."

"Except by barking," complained Juliet.

"They don't bark much unless somebody

To the Point of Tears

goes by, and there are n't any neighbours near enough to hear 'em, even then."

"They do bark," Juliet put in fretfully. "They bark all the time at something. They bark when they 're hungry and when they 've eaten too much, and they bark at the sun and moon and stars, and when they 're not barking, some or all of 'em are fighting. They drive me crazy."

"Jule," said Romeo, sternly, "I don't see what 's the matter with you lately. You act like a sissy girl. Go up into the attic and work on the trapeze for an hour or two, and you 'll feel better. It would n't surprise me now if you got so sissy that you were afraid of mice and snakes."

Juliet's anger rose to the point of tears. "I 'm not afraid of mice," she sobbed, "and you know it. And I 'll hold a little green snake by the tail just as long as you will, so there!"

Man-like, Romeo hated tears. "Shut up, Jule," he said, not unkindly, "and we 'll arbitrate."

When her sobs ceased and she had washed her face in cold water, they calmly argued the question at issue. Romeo candidly admitted that twenty dogs might well be sufficient for people of simple tastes and Juliet did not deny that only a "sissy girl" would be annoyed by barking. Eventually, Romeo promised not to bring home any more dogs unless the present

"C. T."

supply should be depleted by disappearance or accident, and Juliet promised not to chloroform any without his consent. With one accord, they decided to fit out the dogs with brown leather collars trimmed with yellow and to train the herd to follow the automobile.

"They ought to be trained by the thirtieth of June," observed Romeo. "It would make more of a celebration for Uncle if we took 'em along."

"Did you order the monogram put on the automobile?"

"Sure. I told 'em to put 'The Yellow Peril' on each door and on the back, and the initials, 'C. T.' above it everywhere." The twins had adopted a common monogram, signifying "Crosby Twins." It adorned their stationery and their seal, but, as they seldom wrote letters, it had not been of much use.

"We might have the initials put on the dogs' collars, too," Juliet suggested.

"Sure," assented Romeo, cordially. "Then, if we lose any of 'em on the road, we can identify 'em when they're found, and get 'em back."

Juliet saw that she had made a mistake and hoped Romeo would forget about it, but vainly, for he lounged over and made a memorandum on the slate that hung in the hall.

"I wonder," continued Romeo, thought-

Making Up

fully, "if the yard is big enough to train 'em in. We ought not to go out on the road until the thirtieth."

"That 's easy enough," Juliet answered, with a superior air.

"How 'd you go about it?" he demanded.

"If they were my dogs and I wanted 'em to follow me in an automobile, I 'd let 'em fast for a day or two and fill the back seat of the machine with raw meat. They 'd follow quick enough and be good and lively about it, too. They would n't need to be trained."

"Jule," said Romeo, solemnly, "will you please forgive me for calling you a 'sissy girl'?"

"Sure!" Juliet had learned long before she was twenty, that "forgive me," from a man's lips, indicates the uttermost depths of abasement and devotion.

"The fasting won't hurt 'em," Romeo continued, eager to change the subject. "They 're all in good condition now."

"Except the last one. You can see some of his ribs yet."

"You can't by June."

"No, I guess not. Say, Romie, ought n't she to be coming to see us by now?"

"Who?"

"Isabel—what 's-her-name. You know, up at Bernard's."

Happy-hearted comrade though she was, Juliet had a secret longing for feminine asso-

Visiting Cards

ciation, at rare intervals. It would be pleasant she thought, to go skating sometimes with a girl or two instead of the usual crowd of boys. She hated herself fiercely for disloyalty, but the idea recurred persistently.

"I 'm not up on etiquette," Romeo replied, casually, "but I should think, if she wanted to come, she could do it by now. We made a polite call as far as I know."

"We did n't leave any cards."

"Cards? What kind of cards?"

"Why, little cards with our names on 'em. People always leave 'em, in the books, when they make calls."

Romeo went over to the slate again and made another memorandum. "I 'll get 'em. What 'll we have on 'em?"

"We always go together," Juliet suggested, "so I think one will do. Just put on it 'The Crosby Twins,' with our address."

"No need of the address. Everybody who knows us knows where we live."

"Perhaps," Juliet went on, meditatively, "she does n't like me."

"If she does n't," Romeo retorted, "I 'll know the reason why. Do you remember what I did to the red-headed boy from the Ridge who said he would n't skate with the crowd if there was a girl in it?"

Juliet nodded with satisfaction. "But you know, Romie, you can't hit a girl."

The Unfailing Subject

"That 's so," he admitted disconsolately. "That fresh kid had to wear beefsteak over one eye for almost a week."

Juliet laughed at the idea of Isabel with beefsteak bandaged over one eye. "We won't worry about things we can't help," she said, philosophically. "We 've done the proper thing and now it 's up to her. If she does n't come before we get the automobile, she does n't get invited to go out in it."

"You bet she does n't."

The talk quickly turned to the unfailing subject of automobiles. "The Yellow Peril" had been ordered and half paid for, but there was delay in delivery. The brown clothes trimmed with tan leather had also been ordered, as well as the brown felt hats, exactly alike, with yellow ribbon bands. They had the goggles and enjoyed glaring fiercely at each other through them, especially at meals. Juliet had thought of making a veil of yellow chiffon, but Romeo had objected violently. He thought they should look as much alike as possible, so she had yielded.

They had decided to make a wide track through the yard and around the barn to practise on. Suitable space for the automobile had already been set aside in the barn and safely fenced in beyond the reach of canine interference. Romeo had not seen the necessity of the fence until Juliet had pointed out

A Problem

that some of the dogs would want to sleep on the leather cushions. "It would make it smell so doggy," she had said, "that we 'd have to call it 'The Yellow Dog' instead of 'The Yellow Peril.' "

Romeo, with true masculine detachment, could talk automobile with unfailing enthusiasm, and yet think continually about something else. The thought that Isabel might not like Juliet had not occurred to him. It seemed impossible that anybody should not like Juliet, for, in the fond eyes of her twin, she was the most sane and sensible girl in the world.

"Anyhow," thought Romeo as he went to sleep that night, "if Jule wants her to come here, she 's got to do it, that 's all."

He meditated upon the problem for several days without reaching any satisfactory conclusion. At last he determined to go up to see Isabel himself, and, as he phrased it in his own mind, "see how the land lays." It would be difficult to elude Juliet, but, in Romeo's experience, the things one determined to do could nearly always be done.

It was an easy matter to make an errand to the City, " to poke 'em up a bit about the machine," and to get the visiting cards, which had promptly been ordered by mail. Juliet rather insisted upon going along, but was easily dissuaded by the fact that "there

might be a row, and anyway, it 's a man's job."

He came home about dusk with several packages, one of which he carefully concealed under a pile of leaves in the fence corner, just inside the yard. He could easily reach through the palings and lift it over the fence as he passed.

Juliet admired the cards, was delighted with a box of chocolates and two new novels, and condescended to approve of Romeo's new red tie. He had gloves in his pocket, but feared to show them to her, gloves being her pet object of scorn.

After they had cleared off the table, Romeo strolled over to the window. Five of the dogs were gathered about some small object and the yard was littered with bits of white. Under his breath Romeo said something that sounded like profanity, and Juliet pricked up her ears.

"What 's the matter?" she demanded.

"I brought home some flowers," explained Romeo, carefully, for it was written in the covenant that the twins should never, under any circumstances, lie to each other, "and I must have dropped 'em. The dogs have torn 'em to pieces, box and all."

Juliet clapped her hands gleefully. "I 'm glad of it!"

"Why?" he asked quickly, with an uneasy sense that she was a mind-reader.

"Because we 've got so many dogs."

Fortune Favours the Brave

Romeo chose to take offence at the innocent remark and relapsed into gloomy silence. Disdaining to speak, Juliet curled up on the decrepit sofa with a book and the chocolates, and presently went to sleep.

"Fortune favours the brave," he quoted to himself, as he tiptoed into the kitchen, cautiously closing the door. A subtle perfume filled the room and he sniffed appreciatively. An open bottle of vanilla extract stood on the kitchen table, where a pan of fudges was cooling, marked off into neat squares. He wrapped the pan in a newspaper, anointed his handkerchief liberally with the fragrant extract, and softly stole out into the night.

The dogs followed him to the back fence, but did not bark. Only a few soft whines followed him as he sped down the road, thrilled with a sense of adventure and romance. If Juliet should happen to wake, she would think he had gone away because he was angry, and never need know that like some misunderstood knight of old, he was merely upon an errand of chivalry for her. The fudges would do as well as the calla lilies, probably, though he felt instinctively that they were not quite as elegant.

It was a long way to Madame Bernard's, and Juliet's knight-errant was weary, after an exhausting day in town. He paused outside

All Right for Twins

the gate long enough to clean the dust from his shoes with the most soiled of his two handkerchiefs, then went boldly up the steps and rang the bell.

He was embarrassed to find Colonel Kent and Allison there, though the younger man's tact speedily set him at ease again, and enabled him to offer Isabel the pan of fudges with unwonted grace of manner. Then he went over to Madame Bernard.

"Juliet could n't come to-night," he said, "but here 's our card."

Madame could not repress a smile as she read "The Crosby Twins" engraved in the fashionable script of the moment. "How very original," she said, kindly. "Nobody but you and Juliet would have thought of it."

"Jule thought of it," he replied, with evident pride. "She 's more up on etiquette than I am."

"If it 's proper for husband and wife to have their names engraved on the same card," Madame went on, "it must be all right for twins."

"It 's more proper," Romeo returned, "because nobody is so much related as twins are. Husband and wife are only relatives by marriage."

Colonel Kent laughed appreciatively. "Good! May I have some of Miss Isabel's candy?"

Isabel, convulsed with secret mirth, inform-

A Bad Break

ally passed the pan, and only Romeo refused. "I can have 'em any time," he said, generously. "Does n't Jule make dandy fudges, though?"

Everybody agreed that she did. Madame Francesca expressed something more than conventional regret that Juliet had not been able to come.

"She was asleep," Romeo explained, with studied indifference.

"After she wakes," suggested Colonel Kent, "we 'd like very much to have you both come to our house to dinner."

"Thank you," replied Romeo, somewhat stiffly. "We 'd be very much pleased." Then to himself, he added: "That was a lie, but it was n't to Jule, so it does n't matter."

Rose made friendly inquiries about the dogs and told Allison that Romeo was said to have the finest collection of fishing tackle in the State. Much gratified, Romeo invited Allison to go fishing with him as soon as the season opened, and, as an afterthought, politely included the Colonel.

"I 've never been fishing," remarked Isabel, as she could think of nothing else to say.

"Girls are an awful bother in a boat," Romeo returned, with youthful candour. "That is, except Juliet."

Isabel flushed faintly and bit her lips. To

To the Strains of Music

relieve an awkward pause, Madame Francesca asked Allison to play something.

"Yes," said Romeo, "go on and play." He meant to be particularly courteous, but his tone merely indicated that he would not be seriously annoyed by music.

As the first strains came from the piano and violin, Romeo established himself upon the couch beside Isabel, and, in a low, guarded tone, began to talk automobile. Isabel was so much interested that she wholly forgot Aunt Francesca's old-fashioned ideas about interrupting a player, and the conversation became animated.

Both Rose and Allison had too much good sense to be annoyed, but occasionally, until the last chord, they exchanged glances of amusement. When they stopped, Isabel was saying: "Your suits must be just lovely."

Romeo turned with a lordly wave of the hand. "You don't need to stop. Go on!"

"How can you expect us to play properly?" inquired Rose, tactfully, "when you 're talking about automobiles? We 'd much rather listen to you."

"Begin over again, won't you?" asked Allison. He added, with a trace of sarcasm wholly lost upon Romeo: "We 've missed a good deal of it."

Thus encouraged, Romeo began again, thoughtfully allowing Isabel the credit of the

Appropriate Celebration

original suggestion. He dwelt at length upon the fine points involved in the construction of "The Yellow Peril," described the brown leather and the specially designed costumes, and was almost carried away by enthusiasm when he pictured the triumphant progress of the yellow car, followed by twenty dogs in appropriate collars.

"Can you," he inquired of Allison, "think of anything more like a celebration that we could do for Uncle?"

"No," replied Allison, choking back a laugh, "unless you went out at night, too, and had fireworks."

Romeo's expressive face indicated displeasure. "Uncle was such a good man," he said, in a tone of quiet rebuke, "that I don't believe it would be appropriate."

Allison coughed and Colonel Kent hastily went to the window. Madame hid her face for an instant behind her fan and Isabel laughed openly. "I'm sure he was," said Rose, quickly. "Can you remember him at all?"

"No," Romeo responded, "we've never seen him, but he was a brick all the same."

"Are you going to run the car yourself?" queried Rose.

"Of course. Some day I'll take you out," he suggested, kindly, then turned to Isabel and played his highest trump. "Juliet said something about asking you to go with us the

No Kindly Fate

second time we went out. Of course it 's her place to do it."

"I 'd love to go," murmured Isabel.

"She 'll ask you when you come out to return her call," Romeo continued.

"I 've been meaning to come, but I 've been waiting for good roads."

"When you come," he answered, "don't say anything about my having been here. It might make her feel bad to think I went out calling and left her asleep."

"All right—I won't."

As soon as it was possible, without obvious effort, Romeo made his escape, after shaking hands with everyone and promising to come again very soon. "I 'll bring Jule next time. Good-night!"

Once outside, he ran toward home like a hunted wild animal, hoping with all his heart that Juliet was still asleep. It was probable, for more than once she had slept on the sofa all night.

But the kindly fate that had hitherto guided him suddenly failed him now. When he reached home, panting and breathless, having discovered that it was almost midnight, a drooping little figure in a torn kimona opened the door and fell, weeping into his arms.

"Oh, Romie! Romie!" cried Juliet, hysterically. "Where have you been?"

"There," he said, patting her shoulder awk-

wardly. "Don't take on so, Jule. You were asleep, so I went out for a walk. I met Colonel Kent and Allison and I 've been with them all the evening. I 'm sorry I stayed so long."

"I have n't lied," he continued, to himself, exultantly. "Every word is the literal truth."

"Oh, Romie," sobbed Juliet, with a fresh burst of tears, "I don't care where you 've been as long as I 've got you back! We 're twins and we 've got to stand by each other!"

Romeo gently extricated himself from her clinging arms, then stooped to kiss her wet cheek. "You bet!" he whispered.

X

Sweet-and-Twenty

An Hour Before Time

CONTRARY to the usual custom of woman, Isabel was ready fully an hour before the appointed time. She stood before the fire, buttoning a new glove with the sense of abundant leisure that new gloves demand. The dancing flames picked out flashes of light from the silver spangles of her gown and sent them into the farthest corners of the room. A long white plume nestled against her dark hair and shaded her face from the light, but, even in the shadow, she was brilliant, for her eyes sparkled and the high colour bloomed upon her cheeks.

Madame Bernard and Rose sat near by, openly admiring her. She was almost childish in her delight at the immediate prospect and could scarcely wait for Allison to call for her. She went to the window and peered eagerly into the darkness, waiting.

"Isabel, my dear," said Madame, kindly, "never wait at the window for an unmarried man. Nor," she added as an afterthought, "for a married man, unless he happens to be your own husband."

Worldly Wisdom

Isabel turned back into the room, smiling, her colour a little brighter than before. "Why not?"

"Men keep best," returned Madame, somewhat enigmatically, "in a cool, dry atmosphere. If you 'll remember that fact, it may save you trouble in the years to come."

"Such worldly wisdom," laughed Rose, "from such an unworldly woman!"

"I do love the theatre," Isabel sighed, "and I have n't seen a play for a long time."

"I 'm afraid we have n't done as much as we might to make it pleasant for you," Madame continued, regretfully, "but we 'll try to do better and doubtless can, now that the weather is improving."

"It 's been lots nicer than staying alone in a hotel," the girl answered. "I used to go to the matinée a good deal, but I did n't know very many people and it 's no fun to go alone. Don't you and Rose ever go, Aunt Francesca?"

"I go sometimes," said Rose, "but I can't even get her started."

The little grey lady laughed and tapped the arm of her chair with her folded fan. "I fully agree with the clever man who said that 'life would be very endurable were it not for its pleasures.' Far back, somewhere, there must be a strain of Scotch ancestry in me, for I 'take my pleasure sadly.' "

"Which means," commented Rose, "that

Anxiously Waiting

the things other people find amusing do not necessarily amuse you."

"Possibly," Madame assented, with a shrug of her delicate shoulders, "but unless I 'm obliged to, I won't sit in an uncomfortable chair, in a crowd, surrounded by many perfumes unhappily mixed, be played to by a bad orchestra, walked on at will by rude men, and, in the meantime, watch the exaggerated antics of people who cannot make themselves heard, even in a room with only three sides to it."

"I took her to a 'musical comedy' once, in a frivolous moment," explained Rose, "and she 's never forgiven me."

"Why remind me of it?" questioned Madame. "I 've been endeavouring for years to forget it."

Isabel's eyes wandered anxiously to the clock. She had a strong impulse to go to the window again, but remembered that Madame would not approve.

Presently there was the sound of wheels outside, and Allison, very handsome in his evening clothes, came in with an apology for his tardiness. After greeting Madame Bernard and Rose, he bowed to Isabel, with a mock deference which, none the less, contained subtle flattery.

"Silver Girl," he said, "you do me too much honour. I 'm not at all sure that one escort is sufficient for so much loveliness."

A Relief

Isabel smiled, then dimpled irresistibly. She had a secret sense of triumph which she did not stop to analyse.

"Come," he said. "In the words of the poet, 'the carriage waits.'"

They said good-night to the others, and went out. There was silence in the room until the sound of wheels had quite died away, then Rose sighed. With a swift pang, she envied Isabel's glorious youth, then the blood retreated from her heart in shame.

Madame sighed too, but for a different reason. "I suppose I should n't say it," she remarked, "but it 's a relief to have that dear child out of the house for a little while."

"It 's kind of Allison to take her," Rose answered, trying not to wish that she might change places with Isabel.

"Very kind. The Kents are singularly decent about everything. I suppose it was Allison who managed to have Romeo Crosby call upon her the other evening."

"I hardly think so. You remember that Allison had n't seen him since he grew up."

"Shot up, you mean. How rapidly weeds grow!"

"Are the twins weeds?"

"I think so. Still, they 're a wholesome and stimulating sort, even though they have done just as they pleased."

The fire died down into embers. The still-

In Silence at Home

ness would have been unbearable had it not been for the steady ticking of the clock. Madame leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. Rose tried to read, but could not concentrate her mind upon the page.

Her thoughts were far away, with the two who had so recently left the house. In fancy she saw the brilliantly lighted streets, the throng of pleasure seekers and pretty women in gay attire. She heard the sound of wheels, the persistent "honk-honk" of motor cars, and, in the playhouse, the crash of cymbals and drums. Somewhere in the happy crowd were Allison and Isabel, while she sat in silence at home.

Madame Francesca stirred in her chair. "I 've been asleep, I think."

"You 're not going to wait until they come home, are you?"

"Why should I? Isabel has a key."

Rose remembered how Aunt Francesca had invariably waited for her, when some gallant cavalier had escorted her to opera or play, and was foolishly glad, for no discoverable reason.

"I was dreaming," Madame went on, drowsily, "of the little house where Love lived."

"Where was it?" asked Rose gently.

"You know. I 've told you of the little house in the woods where I went as a bride, when I was no older than Isabel. When we

turned the key and went away, we must have left some of our love there. I 've never been back, but I like to think that some of the old-time sweetness is still in the house, shut away like a jewel of great price, safe from meddling hands."

Transfigured

Only once before, in the fifteen years they had lived together, had Madame Bernard spoken of her brief marriage, yet Rose knew, by a thousand little betrayals, that the past was not dead, but vitally alive.

"I can bear it," said Madame, half to herself, "because I have been his wife. If he had been taken away before we were married, I should have gone, too. But now I have only to wait until God brings us together again."

Outwardly, Rose was calm and unperturbed; inwardly, tense and unstrung. She wondered if, at last, the sorrow had been healed enough for speech. Upstairs there was a room that was always locked. No one but Aunt Francesca ever entered it, and she but rarely. Once or twice, Rose had chanced to see her coming through the open door, transfigured by some spiritual exaltation too great for words. For days afterward there was about her a certain uplift of soul, fading gradually into her usual serenity.

Mr. Boffin stalked in, jumped into Madame's lap, and began to purr industriously. She

A Pretty Picture

laughed as she stroked his tawny head and the purr increased rapidly in speed and volume.

"Don't let him burst himself," cautioned Rose, welcoming the change of mood. "I never knew a cat to purr so—well, so thoroughly, did you?"

"He 's lost his hold of the brake," Madame answered. "Are you going to wait until Isabel comes home?"

"Of course not."

"Then let 's go up and read for a little while."

Rose waited until Madame was half way up the long flight before she turned down the lights and followed her. It made a pretty picture—the little white-haired lady in grey on the long stairway, with the yellow cat upon her shoulder, looking back with the inscrutable calmness of the Sphinx.

Rose felt that, for herself, sleep would be impossible until Isabel returned. She hoped that Aunt Francesca would not want her to read aloud, but, as it chanced, she did. However, the chosen book was of the sort which banishes insomnia, and, in less than an hour, Madame was sound asleep, with Mr. Boffin purring in his luxurious silk-lined basket at the foot of her bed.

Alone in her own room, Rose waited, frankly jealous of her young cousin and fiercely despising herself for it. She recalled the happy hours she and Allison had spent with their

music and berated herself bitterly for her selfishness, but to no avail. As the hours dragged by, every moment seemed an eternity. Worn by her unaccustomed struggle with self, she finally slept.

Meanwhile, Isabel was the gayest of the gay. The glittering lights of the playhouse formed a fitting background for her, and Allison watched her beautiful, changing face with an ever-increasing sense of delight. The play itself was an old story to him, but the girl was a new sensation, and while she watched the mimic world beyond the footlights, he watched her.

The curtain of the first act descended upon a woman, waiting at the window for a man who did not come, and, most happily, Isabel remembered the conversation at home in the earlier part of the evening.

"Foolish woman," she said, "to wait at the window."

"Why?" asked Allison, secretly amused.

"I would n't wait at the window for an unmarried man, nor for a married man, either, unless he was my own husband."

"Why?" he asked, again.

"Because men keep best in a cool dry atmosphere. Did n't you know that?"

"How did you happen to discover it, Sweet-and-Twenty?"

Isabel answered with a smile, which meant much or little, as one chose. Presently she

Like a Mirror

remembered something else that happened to be useful.

"Look," she said, indicating a man in the front seat who had fallen asleep. "He 's taking his pleasure sadly."

"Perhaps he 's happier to be asleep. He may not care for the play."

"Somebody once said," she went on hastily, seeing that she was making a good impression, "that life would be very endurable were it not for its pleasures."

Allison laughed. He had the sense of discovering a bright star that had been temporarily overshadowed by surrounding planets.

"I did n't know you could talk so well," he observed, with evident admiration.

Isabel flushed with pleasure—not guilt. She had no thought of sailing under false colours, but reflected the life about her as innocently as a mirror might, if conveniently placed.

Repeated curtain calls for the leading woman, at the end of the third act, delayed the final curtain by the few minutes that would have enabled them to catch the earlier of the two theatre trains. Allison was not wholly displeased, though he feared that Aunt Francesca and Rose might be unduly anxious about Isabel. As they had more than an hour and a half to wait, before the last train, he suggested going to a popular restaurant.

"We 'll Do It Again"

Thrilled with pleasure and excitement, she eagerly consented. Fortunately, she did not have to talk much, for the chatter of the gay crowd, and the hard-working orchestra made conversation difficult, if not impossible.

"I 've never been in a place like this before," she ventured. "So late, I mean."

"But you enjoy it, don't you?"

"Oh, yes! So much!" The dark eyes that turned to his were full of happy eagerness, like a child's.

Allison's pulses quickened, with man's insatiable love of Youth. "We 'll do it again," he said, "if you 'll come with me."

"I will, if Aunt Francesca will let me."

"She 's willing to trust you with me, I think. She 's known me ever since I was born and she helped father bring me up. Aunt Francesca has been like a mother to me."

"She says she does n't care for the theatre," resumed Isabel, who did not care to talk about Aunt Francesca, "but I love it. I believe I could go every night."

"Don't make the mistake of going too often to see what pleases you, for you might tire of it. Perhaps plays 'keep best in a cool, dry atmosphere,' as you say men do."

"You 're laughing at me," she said, reproachfully.

"Indeed I 'm not. I knew a man once who fell desperately in love with a woman, and, as

The Pleasing Child

soon as he found that she cared for him, he started for the uttermost ends of the earth."

"What for?"

"That they might not risk losing their love for each other, through satiety. You know it 's said to die more often of indigestion than starvation."

"I don't know anything about it," she murmured with downcast eyes.

"You will, though, before long. Some awkward, half-baked young man about twenty will come to you, bearing the divine fire."

"I don't know any," she answered.

"How about the pleasing child who called upon you the other night, with the imported bonbons?" Allison's tone was not wholly kind, for he had just discovered that he did not like Romeo Crosby.

Isabel became fairly radiant with smiles. "Was n't he too funny?"

"He 's all right," returned Allison, generously. "I 'm afraid, however, that he 'll be taking you out so much that I won't have a chance."

"Oh, no!" said Isabel, softly. Then she added with frankness utterly free from coquetry, "I like you much better."

"Really? Why, please?"

"Oh, I don't know. You 're so much more, well, grown-up, you know, and more refined."

"Thank you. I 'm glad the slight foreign polish distinguishes me somewhat."

Not Proper

"Cousin Rose said you were very distinguished." She watched him narrowly as she spoke.

"So is Cousin Rose. In fact, no one could be more so," he answered, with evident approval.

"Is she going to play your accompaniments for you, when you begin the season?"

A shadow crossed his face. "I 'm afraid not. I wish she could."

"Why can't she?"

"On account of Madame Grundy. It would n 't be proper."

"I don't see why," objected Isabel, daringly. "She 's ten years older than you are."

Allison bit his lips and the expression of his face subtly changed. "You 're ten years younger," he replied, coldly, "and I could n't take you. That does n't make any difference."

Seeing that she had made a mistake, Isabel sat quietly in her chair and watched the people around her until it was time to go. Greatly to her delight, they went to the station in an automobile.

"Is n't this glorious!" she cried. "I 'm so glad the Crosbys are going to have one. I hope they 'll take me often."

With the sure instinct of Primitive Woman, she had said the one thing calculated to make

Allison forget his momentary change of mood.

"I 'm sorry I have none," he said. "'Romeo Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?' How times have changed! The modern Lochinvar has a touring-car, and some day you 'll be eloping in the most up-to-date fashion."

"What makes you talk to me about him?" queried Isabel, with uplifted eyes. "You know I don't like him."

"All right," he answered, good-naturedly. "I won't. I hope Aunt Francesca won't be worried about you because we 're so late in getting back."

"I don't see why she should mind. Mamma never cares what I do. She 's often been away for weeks, lecturing, and I 've been in the hotel alone."

He repressed the uncharitable comment that was upon his lips and reverted to the subject of the play. "I 'm glad you 've enjoyed it. I wanted you to have a good time."

"I 've had the best time I ever had in my life," she responded, with evident sincerity. "Is n't it wonderful what they can do with a room that has only three sides?"

"It surely is. I 've had a good time, too, Silver Girl. Thank you for coming."

"You 're welcome," she returned sweetly.

The carriage was waiting at the station, and Isabel was very quiet all the way home. Thinking that she must be tired, Allison said

Disquieted

little until they reached Madame Bernard's, and he had seen her safely into the house. He insisted upon taking off her gloves and coat and would have extended his friendly services to her hat, had she not laughingly forbade him to touch it.

"Good-night," he said. "We'll go again soon."

"All right. Good-night, and thank you ever so much."

The sound of the key in the lock had wakened Rose from her uneasy sleep. She heard their laughter, though she could not distinguish what they said, and recognised a new tone in Allison's voice. She heard the door close, the carriage roll away, and, after a little, Isabel's hushed footsteps on the stairs. Then another door closed softly and a light glimmered afar into the garden until the shade was drawn.

Wide-eyed and fearful, she slept no more, for the brimming Cup of Joy, that had seemed within her reach, was surely beyond it now. Oppressed with loss and pain, her heart beat slowly, as though it were weary of living. Until daybreak she wondered if he, too, was keeping the night watch, from a wholly different point of view.

But, man-like, Allison had long ago gone to sleep, in the big Colonial house beyond the turn in the road, idly humming to himself:

> Come and kiss me, Sweet-and-Twenty;
> Youth 's a stuff will not endure !

XI

Keeping the Faith

The "Grand Air"

COLONEL KENT and Allison critically surveyed the table, where covers were laid for seven. "Someway it lacks the 'grand air' of Madame Bernard's," commented the Colonel, "yet I can't see anything wrong, can you?"

"Not a thing," Allison returned. "The 'grand air' you allude to comes, I think, from Aunt Francesca herself. When she takes her place opposite you, I 'm sure we shall compare very favourably with our neighbours."

The Crosby twins arrived first, having chartered the station hack for the evening. As the minds of both were above such minor details as clothes, their attire was of the nondescript variety, but their exuberant youth and high spirits gallantly concealed all defects and the tact of their hosts quickly set them both at their ease.

Romeo somewhat ostentatiously left their card upon the mantel, so placed that all who came near might read in fashionable script:

"The Crosby Twins." Having made this concession to the conventionalities, he lapsed at once into an agreeable informality that amused the Colonel very much.

Soon the Colonel was describing some of the great battles in which he had taken part, and Romeo listened with an eager interest which was all the more flattering because it was so evidently sincere. In the library, meanwhile, Allison was renewing his old acquaintance with Juliet.

"You used to be a perfect little devil," he smiled.

"I am yet," Juliet admitted, with a frank laugh. "At least people say so. Romie and I are n't popular with our neighbours."

"That does n't speak well for the neighbours. Were they never young themselves?"

"I don't believe so. I 've thought, sometimes, that lots of people were born grown-up."

"They say abroad, that there are no children in America—that they are merely little people treated like grown-ups."

"The modern American child is a horror," said Juliet, unconsciously quoting from an article in a recent magazine. "They 're ill bred and they don't mind, and there 's nobody who wants to make 'em mind except people who have no authority to do it."

"Why is it?" inquired Allison, secretly amused.

Always Together

"Because spanking has gone out of fashion," she answered, in all seriousness. "It takes so much longer for moral suasion to work. Romie and I never had any 'moral suasion,'—we were brought up right."

Juliet's tone indicated a deep filial respect for her departed parents and there was a far-away look in her blue eyes which filled Allison with tender pity.

"You must be lonely sometimes," he said, kindly.

"Lonely?" repeated Juliet in astonishment; "why, how could I ever be lonely with Romie?"

"Of course you could n't be lonely when he was there, but you must miss him when he 's away from you."

"He 's never away," she answered, with a toss of her curly head. "We 're most always together, unless he goes to town—or up to your house," she added, as an afterthought.

Allison was about to say that Romeo had never been there before, but wisely kept silent.

"Twins are the most related of anybody," Juliet went on. "An older brother or sister may get ahead of you and be so different that you never catch up, but twins have to trot right along together. It 's just the difference between tandem and double harness."

"Suppose Romeo should marry?" queried Allison, carelessly. "Just Us"

"I 'd die," replied Juliet, firmly, her cheeks burning as with flame.

"Or suppose you married?"

"Then Romie would die," she answered, with conviction. "We 've both promised not to get married and we always keep our promises to each other."

"And to other people, too?"

"Not always. Sometimes it 's necessary to break a promise, or to lie, but never to each other. If Romie asks me anything I don't want to tell him, I just say 'King's X,' and if I ask him anything, he says 'it 's none of your business,' and it 's all right. Twins have to be square with each other."

"Don't you ever quarrel?"

"We may differ, and of course we have fought sometimes, but it does n't last long. We can always arbitrate. Say, do you know Isabel Ross?"

"I have that pleasure. She 's coming to dinner to-night, with Aunt Francesca and Miss Rose."

"Oh," said Juliet, in astonishment. "If I 'd known that, I 'd have dressed up more. I thought it was just us."

'It is 'just us,'" he assured her, kindly; "a very small and select party composed of our most charming neighbours, and believe me,

Allison and Juliet

my dear Miss Juliet, that nobody could possibly be 'dressed up more.'"

Juliet bloomed with pleasure and her eyes sparkled. "Isabel came out to see us," she continued, "and I don't think she had a good time. We showed her all our fishing rods, and let her help us make fudges, and we did stunts for her on the trapeze in the attic, and Romie told her she could have any one of our dogs, but she said she did n't want it, and she would n't stay to supper. I guess she thought I could n't cook just because she can't. Romie said if I 'd make another chocolate cake like the one I made the day after she was there, he 'd take it up to her and show her whether I could cook or not."

"I believe he would," returned Allison, with a trace of sarcasm which Juliet entirely missed. Then he laughed at the vision of Romeo bearing the proof of his twin's culinary skill into Madame Bernard's living room.

"You come out and see us," urged Juliet, hospitably.

"I will, indeed. May I have a dog?"

"They 're Romie 's and I can't give 'em away, but I guess he could spare you one. Would you rather have a puppy or a full-grown dog?"

"I 'd have to see 'em first," he replied, tactfully steering away from the danger of a choice. He had not felt the need of a

dog and was merely trying to be pleasant.

"There 's plenty to see," she went on, with a winning smile. "I like dogs myself but we fought once because I thought we had too many. We 've named 'em all out of an old book we found in the attic. There 's Achilles, and Hector, and Persephone, and Minerva, and Circe and Juno, and Priam, and Eurydice, and goodness knows how many more. Romie knows all their names, but I don't."

Hearing the sound of wheels outside, Colonel Kent, with a certain old-fashioned hospitality to which our generation might happily return, went to open the door himself for his expected guests. Juliet went hastily to the mirror to make sure that her turbulent curls were in order, and Romeo intercepted Allison on his way to the door.

"I heard what she said," Romeo remarked, in a low tone, "about my having been up here, but I did n't tell her I was here. I don't lie to Jule, but I 'm responsible only for what I say, not for what she thinks."

Allison smiled with full understanding of the situation. "We men have to be careful what we say to women," he replied, with an air of caution and comradeship that made his young guest feel like a full-fledged man of the world.

"Sure," assented Romeo, with a broad grin

Put at Ease

and a movement of one eyelid which was almost—but not quite—a wink.

Presently the three other guests came in, followed by the Colonel. Madame Francesca was in white silk over which violets had been scattered with a lavish hand, then woven into the shining fabric. She wore violets in her hair and at her belt, and a single amethyst at her throat. Isabel was in white, with flounces of spangled lace, and Rose was unusually lovely in a gown of old gold satin and a necklace of palest topaz. In her dark hair was a single yellow rose.

Juliet was for the moment aghast at so much magnificence and painfully conscious of her own white muslin gown. Madame Francesca, reading her thought, drew the girl's tall head down and kissed her. "What a clover blossom you are," she said, "all in freshest white, with pink cheeks and sunshiny curls!"

Thus fortified, Juliet did not mind Isabel's instinctive careful appraisement of her gown, and she missed, happily, the evident admiration with which Romeo's eyes followed Isabel's every movement.

"Why did n't you tell me?" Allison was asking Rose, "so I could have ransacked the town for golden roses?"

"I 've repeatedly done it myself," laughed Rose, "without success. I usually save my yellow gowns for June when all the yellow

rose bushes in the garden may lavish their wealth upon me."

"Happy rose," Allison returned, lightly, "to die in so glorious a cause."

The twins were almost at the point of starvation when dinner was announced, though they had partaken liberally of bread and butter and jam just before leaving home. Romeo had complained a little but had not been sufficiently Spartan to refuse the offered refreshment.

"I don't see why you want to feed me now and spoil my dinner," he grumbled, as he reached out for a second slice.

"I don't want to spoil your dinner," Juliet had answered, with her mouth full. "Can't you see I 'm eating, too? We don't want to be impolite when we 're invited out, and eat too much."

"You 've been reading the etiquette book," remarked Romeo, with unusual insight, "and there 's more foolish things in that book than in any other we 've got. When we 're invited out to eat, why should n't we eat? They may have been cooking for days just to get ready for us and they won't like it if we only pick at things."

"Maybe they want some left," Juliet replied, brushing aside the crumbs. "I remember how mad Mamma was once when the minister ate two pieces of pie and she had to make another

Somewhat Subdued

the next day or divide one piece between you and me."

"I 'll bet she made another. She always fed us, and I remember that the kids around the corner could n't even have bread and molasses between meals."

On the way to the dining-room, Juliet drew her brother aside and whispered to him: "watch the others, then you 'll be sure of getting the right fork."

"Huh!" he returned, resentfully, having been accustomed to only one fork since he and Juliet began to keep house for themselves.

When he saw the array of silver at his plate, however, he blessed her for the hint. As the dinner progressed by small portions of oysters, soup, and fish, he gratefully remembered the bread and jam. The twins noted that the others always left a little on their plates, but proudly disdained the subterfuge for themselves.

Madame Francesca sat opposite the Colonel and Rose was at his right. Romeo sat next to her and across from them was Allison, between Isabel and Juliet.

Somewhat subdued by the unfamiliar situation, the twins said very little during dinner. Juliet took careful note of the appointments of the table and dining-room, and of the gowns the other women wore. When Romeo was not occupied with his dinner and the various

Forced Merriment

forks, he watched Isabel with frank admiration, and wondered what made the difference between her and Juliet.

Everybody tried to produce general conversation, but could extract only polite monosyllables from the twins. Questions addressed directly to them were briefly answered by "yes" or "no," or "I don't know," or, more often, by a winning smile which included them all.

Had it not been for Madame Francesca, gallantly assisted by the Colonel, the abnormal silence of the younger guests might have reacted unfavourably upon the entertainment, for Isabel was as quiet as she usually was, in the presence of her aunt and cousin, Allison became unable to think of topics of general interest, and Rose's efforts to talk pleasantly while her heart was aching were no more successful than such efforts usually are.

But Madame Francesca, putting aside the burden of her seventy years, laughed and talked and told stories with all the zest of a girl. Inspired by her shining example, the Colonel dragged forth a few musty old anecdotes and offered them for inspection. They were new to the younger generation, and Madame affected to find them new also.

Rose wondered at her, as often, envying her the gift of detachment. The fear that had come upon Rose at midnight was with her still, haunting her, waking or sleeping, like

Breaking Bread Together.

some evil thing. Proudly she said to herself that she would seek no man, though her heart should break for love of him; that though her soul writhed in anguish, neither he nor the woman who took him from her should ever even suspect she cared.

She forced herself to meet Allison's eyes with a smile, to answer his questions, and to put in a word, now and then, when Madame or the Colonel paused. Yet, with every sense at its keenest, she noted Isabel's downcast eyes, the self-conscious air with which Allison spoke to her, and the exaggerated consideration of Juliet which he instinctively adopted as a shield. She saw, too, that Isabel was secretly annoyed whenever Allison spoke to Juliet, and easily translated the encouraging air with which Isabel met Romeo's admiring glances. Once, when he happened to turn quickly enough to see, a shadow crossed Allison's face, and he bit his lips.

"How civilised the world has become," Madame was saying, lightly. "The mere breaking of bread together precludes all open hostility. Bitter enemies may meet calmly at the dinner table of a mutual friend, and I understand that, in the higher circles in which we do not care to move, a man may escort his divorced wife out to dinner, and, without bitterness, congratulate her upon her approaching marriage."

Unsought Joy

"I 've often thought," returned the Colonel, more seriously, "that the modern marriage service should be changed to read 'until death or divorce do us part.' It 's highly inconsistent as it stands."

"'Consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds,'" she quoted. "Inconsistency goes as far toward making life attractive as its pleasures do toward spoiling it."

"What do you call pleasure?" queried Allison.

"The unsought joy. If you go out to hunt for it, you don't often get it. When you do, you 've earned it and are entitled to it. True pleasure is a free gift of the gods, like a sense of humour."

By some oblique and unsuspected way, the words brought a certain comfort to Rose. Without bitterness, she remembered that Allison had once said: "In any true mating, they both know." Over and over again she said to herself, stubbornly: "I will have nothing that is not true—nothing that is not true."

It was a wise hostess who discovered the fact that changing rooms may change moods; that many a successful dinner has an aftermath in the drawing-room as cold and dismal as a party call. Madame Francesca had once characterised the hour after dinner as "the stick of a sky-rocket, which never fails to return and

A Strange Peace

bring disillusion with it." Hence she postponed it as long as she could, but the Colonel himself gave the signal by moving back his chair.

An awkward pause followed, which lasted until Rose went to the piano of her own accord and began to play. At length she drifted into the running chords of a familiar accompaniment and Allison took his violin and joined in. As he stood by Rose, the mere fact of his nearness brought her a strange peace. Had she looked up, she would have seen that though he stood so near her, he had eyes only for Isabel and was playing to her alone.

Isabel did not seem to care. She sat with her hands folded idly in her lap, occasionally glancing at the twins who sat together on a sofa across the room. Madame Bernard and the Colonel had gone out on the balcony that opened off of the library.

The night was cool, yet had in it the softness of May. Every wandering wind brought a subtle, exquisite fragrance from orchards blooming afar. High in the heavens swung the pale gold moon of Spring.

"What a night," said Madame, almost in a whisper. "It seems almost as if there never had been another Spring."

"And as if there never would be another."

"That may be true, for one or both of us," she replied, with unwonted sadness.

"My work is done," sighed the Colonel. "I have only to wait now."

"Sometimes I think that all of Life is waiting," she went on, with a little catch in her voice, "and yet we never know what we were waiting for, unless—when all is done——"

A warm, friendly hand closed over hers. "Do not question too much, dear friend, for the God who ordained the beginning can safely be trusted with the end, as well as with all that lies between. Do you know," he continued, in a different tone, "a night like this always makes me think of those wonderful lines:

"'The blessed damozel leaned out
From the gold bar of Heaven;
Her eyes were deeper than the depth
Of waters stilled at even;
She had three lilies in her hand
And the stars in her hair were seven.'"

Francesca's eyes filled and the stars swam before her, for she remembered the three white lilies the Colonel had put into the still hands of his boy's mother, just before the casket was closed. "I wonder," she breathed, "if—they—know."

"I wonder, too," he said.

The strains of the violin floated out upon the scented night, vibrant with love and longing, with passion and pain. Something had come into the music that was never there before, but only Rose knew it.

A Promise

"Richard," said Francesca, suddenly, "if you should go first, and it should be as we hope and pray it may be—if people know each other there, and can speak and be understood, will you tell him that I am keeping the faith; that I have only been waiting since we parted?"

"Yes. And if it should be the other way, will you tell her that I, too, am waiting and keeping the faith, and that I have done well with our boy?"

"I will," she promised.

The last chord of violin and piano died into silence. Colonel Kent bent down and lifted Madame's hand to his lips, then they went in together.

XII

An Enchanted Hour

Unending Hours

THE days dragged on so wearily that, to Rose, the hours seemed unending. Allison came to the house frequently, but seldom spoke of his music; for more than a week, he did not ask her to play at all. On the rare occasions when he brought his violin with him, the old harmony seemed entirely gone. The pianist's fingers often stumbled over the keys even though Allison played with new authority and that magical power that goes by the name of "inspiration," for want of a better word.

Once she made a mistake, changing a full chord into a dissonance so harsh and nerve-racking that Allison shuddered, then frowned. When they had finished, he turned to her, saying, kindly: "You 're tired, Rose. I 've been a selfish brute and let you work too hard."

Quick denial was on her lips, but she stopped in time and followed his lead gracefully. "Yes, and my head aches, too. If all of you will excuse me, I 'll go up and rest for a little while."

Nothing that Is not True

Evening after evening, she made the same excuse, longing for her own room, with a locked and bolted door between her and the outer world. Lonely and miserable though she was, she had at least the sense of shelter. Pride, too, sustained her, for, looking back to the night they met, months ago, she could remember no word nor act, or even a look of hers that had been out of keeping.

Over and over again she insisted to herself, stubbornly: "I will have nothing that is not true—nothing that is not true." In the midnight silences, when she lay wide awake, though all the rest of the world slept, the words chimed in with her heart-beats: "Nothing that is not true—nothing—that is—not true."

Madame Francesca, loving Rose dearly, became sorely troubled and perplexed. She could not fail to see and understand, and, at times, feared that Allison and Isabel must see and understand also. She watched Rose faithfully and shielded her at every possible point. When Isabel inquired why Rose was always tired in the evening, Madame explained that she had been working too hard and that she had made her promise to rest.

Rose spent more time than usual at the piano but she neglected her own work in favour of Allison's accompaniments. When she was alone, she could play them creditably, even without the notes, but if, by any chance,

A Grave Problem

he stood beside her, waiting until the prelude was finished, she faltered at the first sound of the violin.

At last she gave it up and kept more and more to her own room. Madame meditated upon the advisability of sending Isabel away, providing it could be done gracefully, or even taking her on some brief journey, thus leaving Rose in full possession of the house.

Yet, in her heart, she knew that it would be only a subterfuge; that it was better to meet the issues of Life squarely than to attempt to hide from them, since inevitably all must be met. She could not bear to see Rose hurt, nor could she endure easily the spectacle of her beloved foster son upon the verge of a lifelong mistake. Several times she thought of talking to Colonel Kent, and, more rarely, of speaking to Allison himself, but she had learned to apply to speech the old maxim referring to letter-writing: "When in doubt, don't."

It happened that Allison came late one afternoon, when Isabel had gone to town in search of new finery and Rose was in her own room. Madame had just risen from her afternoon nap, and, after he had waited a few moments, she came down.

"Where 's Isabel?" he asked, as he greeted her.

"Shopping," smiled Madame.

"I know, but I thought she 'd be at home by

Something Wrong

this time. She told me she was coming out on the earlier train."

"She may have met someone and gone to the matinée. It 's Wednesday."

"She did n't need to do that. I 'll take her whenever she wants to go and she knows it."

"I did n't say she had gone—I only said she might have gone. She may be waiting for the trimming of a hat to be changed, or for an appointment with tailor or dressmaker or manicure, or any one of a thousand other things. When you see her, she can doubtless give a clear account of herself."

"Did Rose go with her?" he asked, after a brief pause.

"No, she 's asleep," sighed Madame. "Allison, I 'm worried about Rose and have been for some time. She is n't well."

"I thought something was wrong," he replied, without interest. "She can't seem to play even the simplest accompaniment any more, and she used to do wonders, even with heavy work."

"I think," ventured Madame, cautiously, "that she needs to get out more. If someone would take her for a walk or a drive every day, it would do her good."

"Probably," assented Allison, with a far-away look in his eyes. "If you want to borrow our horses at any time, Aunt Francesca, when yours are not available, I hope you 'll feel free

Short and Sharp

to telephone for them. They 're almost eating their heads off and the exercise would do them good."

"Thank you," she answered, shortly. Allison noted the veiled sharpness of her tone and wondered why anyone should take even slight offence at the friendly offer of a coach and pair.

"It must be nearly time for the next train," he resumed. "Is there anyone at the station to meet Isabel?"

"Nobody but the coachman and the carriage," returned Madame, dryly. "I 'm not in the habit of being asked whether or not I have made proper provision for my guests."

"I beg your pardon, Aunt Francesca. I would have known, of course, if I had stopped to think."

"How is your father?" she put in, abruptly.

"All right, I guess. He 's making a garden and the whole front yard is torn up as though sewer pipes were about to be put in."

Madame's heart softened with pity, for she knew that only loneliness would have set the Colonel to gardening. "I must go over and see it," she said, in a different tone. "My valuable advice has n't been asked, but I think I could help a little."

"Undoubtedly. Your own garden is one of the loveliest I have ever seen. Is n't that the train?"

It 's Isabel!

"I think so. If Isabel comes, I believe I 'll leave you to entertain her while I drive over to inspect the new garden."

She was oppressed, as never before, by the necessity of speech, and, of all those around her, Colonel Kent was the only one to whom it would be possible for her to say a word. She did not stop to consider what she could accomplish by it, for in her heart, she knew that she was helpless—also that a great deal of the trouble in the world has not been caused by silence.

Allison drummed on the arm of his chair until he heard the rumble of wheels, then went to the window. "It 's Isabel," he announced, joyously. "I 'll go down and help her out—she may have parcels."

Presently they came in together, laughing. Isabel's face was flushed and Allison was heavily laden with packages, both small and large. "I feel like Santa Claus," he cried, gaily, to Madame, as she passed them on the way out.

She smiled, but did not take the trouble to speak. "Colonel Kent's," she called to the driver, as she closed the carriage door with a resounding bang, "and please hurry."

The Colonel was on the veranda when she arrived, superintending the gardening operations from there. He greeted her with surprise, for it was not her way to drive over there

Work to be Done

alone. "I am deeply honoured," he said, as he assisted her up the steps. "May I order tea?"

"No, thank you," she answered, somewhat primly. It was evident that she was ill at ease. "I understood from Allison that you were doing all this yourself. Instead, I find you sitting on the veranda like a landed proprietor, in command of an army of slaves."

"Two Irishmen don't make an army," he laughed, "though I 'll admit that, if angry, they would make a formidable force. I helped to dig for a while this morning, but it did n't seem to agree with me, so I quit. My work seems to be done," he continued, with a sigh.

"No, it is n't," she returned, sharply. "There 's work to be done, but whether you or I or both together can do it, is extremely doubtful."

"What do you mean, Francesca?"

Madame leaned toward him confidentially. "Richard," she said, in a low tone, "has it ever occurred to you that Allison might marry?"

A shadow crossed his face, then vanished in a smile. "Yes. Why?"

"Have you ever seen a woman you would be willing for him to marry?"

"Only one."

"And she——?"

The Same Right

"Rose," said the Colonel, softly. "Your Rose."

"I 've felt that way, too," whispered Madame. There was silence for the space of a heart-beat, then she cried out sharply: "But it is n't Rose—it 's Isabel!"

"What?" he cried, startled for once out of his usual calm. "That child?"

"'That child' is past twenty, and he is only ten years older. There was fifteen years' difference between you and—" Madame forebore to speak the name of the dead and beloved wife.

Colonel Kent turned his dim blue eyes toward the hills. Behind them the sun was setting, and he could guess that the gold of the Spring afternoon was scattered like star dust over the little sunken grave. He left Madame and went to the end of the veranda, where he stood for a few moments, facing the West. Then he came back.

"Francesca," he said, slowly, "you and I are on the Western slope and have been for a long time. The Valley of the Shadow lies at the foot of the hill and the descent is almost made. But the boy is young, and most of the journey lies before him. You chose for yourself, and so did I. Shall we not grant him the same right?"

"Yes, but Rose——"

"Rose," interrupted the Colonel, "is too

Asking for Comfort

good for any man—even my own son, though, as I said before, she is the only woman I would willingly see him marry. You stand almost in his mother's place to him, but neither you nor I can shield him now. We must try to remember that his life is his—to make or mar."

"I know," she sighed, "I 've thought it all out."

"Besides," he went on, "what could we do? Separation would n't last long, if he wants her, and talking would only alienate him from us. Perhaps you could bear it, but I—I could n't."

"Nor I," she returned, quickly. "When we come to the sundown road, we need all the love we have managed to take with us from the summit of the hill. I had n't meant to say anything to anyone," she went on, in a changed tone, "but my heart was full, and you are——"

"Your best friend, Francesca, as you are mine. It seems to take a lifetime for us to learn that wisdom consists largely in a graceful acceptance of things that do not immediately concern us."

"How like you," she responded, with a touch of her old manner. "I ask for comfort and you give me an epigram."

"Many people find satisfaction in epigrams," he reminded her. "Sometimes a snap-shot is better than an oil painting."

"Or a geometrical design, or even a map,"

The Moonless Night

she continued, catching his mood. The talk drifted to happier themes and Madame was quite herself again at dusk, when she rose to go.

On the way back, she passed Allison, returning home to dinner by a well-worn path, but he was thinking of something else and did not see her at all.

The lilac-scented midnight was starred here and there with white blooms when May went out and June came in. Drifts of "bridal wreath" were banked against the side of the house and a sweet syringa breathed out a faint perfume toward the hedge of lilacs beyond. Blown petals of pink and white died on the young grass beneath Madame's wild crab-apple tree, transplanted from a distant woodland long ago to glorify her garden.

The hour was one of enchantment, yet to Rose, leaning out into the moonless night, the beauty of it brought only pain. She wondered, dully, if she should ever find surcease; if somewhere, on the thorny path ahead, there might not be some place where she could lay the burden of her heartache down. Her pride, that had so long sustained her, was beginning to fail her now. It no longer seemed more vital than life itself that Allison should not know.

She had the hurt woman's longing for escape, but could think of no excuse for flight. She

The Fading Rose

knew Aunt Francesca would manage it, in some way, should she ask, and that she would be annoyed by no troublesome questions, yet loyalty held her fast, for she knew how lonely the little old lady would be without her.

Day by day, the tension increased almost to the breaking point. June filled the garden with rosebuds, but their pale namesake in the big white house took no heed of them. She no longer concerned herself about her gowns, but wore white almost constantly, that her pallor might not show.

The roses broke from their green sheaths, then bloomed, opening their golden hearts to every wandering bee. The house was full of roses. Aunt Francesca wore them even on her morning gowns and Isabel made wreaths of red roses to twine in her dark hair. Every breeze brought fragrance to the open windows and scattered it through the house.

Madame's heart ached for Rose, but still she said no word, though it seemed to her that the blindness of the others could not last much longer. She could not take Rose away unless she took Isabel also, and, should she do that, things would soon be just as they were now.

As Rose faded, Isabel blossomed into the full flower of her youth. Her high, bird-like laugh echoed constantly through the house and garden, whether anyone was with her or not.

A Definite Thought

With sinking heart, Rose envied her even a tithe of her abundant joy.

As the moon approached its full, the roses had begun to drop their petals. Under every bush was a scattered bit of fragrance that meant both death and resurrection. Far down in the garden, where the sunken lily-pool mirrored the stars, the petals of golden roses drifted idly across the shining surface.

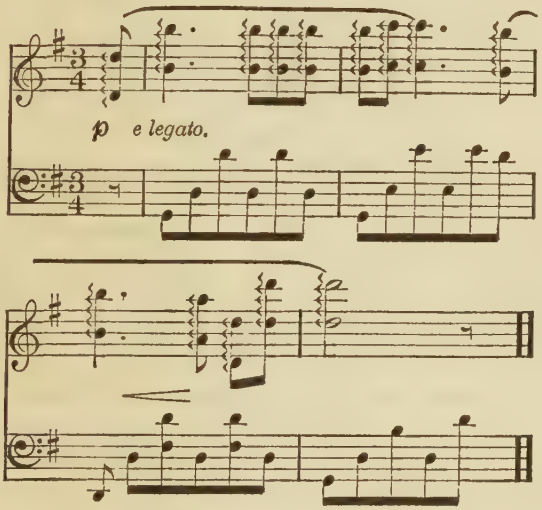
Rose had worn white at dinner, as she always did, now, the night the June moon came to its full. Isabel, too, was in white, but with a difference, for as surely as the older woman's white was mourning, her silver spangles were donned for joy. At the table, Madame had done most of the talking, for Isabel's conversational gifts were limited, at best, and Rose was weary beyond all words.

After dinner she went to the piano and struck a few aimless chords. Isabel, with a murmured excuse, went up to her own room. "Nothing that is not true," said Rose to herself, steadily; "nothing that is not true."

Presently a definite thought took shape in her mind. To-morrow she would tell Aunt Francesca, and see if it could not be arranged for her to go away somewhere, anywhere, alone. Or, if not to-morrow, at least the day after, as soon as she had seen him again. She wanted one last look to take with her into the prison-

house, where she must wrestle with her soul alone.

Renunciation



Her stiff fingers shaped the melody that Aunt Francesca loved, and into it went all her own longing, her love, and her pain. The notes thrilled with an ecstasy of renunciation, and the vibrant chords trembled far out into the the night.

A Shining Figure

A man entered the gate very quietly, paused, then turned into the garden, to soothe his wildly beating heart for a few moments with the balm of scent and sound. Upstairs, behind the shelter of the swaying curtain, a shining figure drew back into the shadow. Smiling, and with an agreeable sense of adventure, Isabel tiptoed down the back stairs, and entered the garden, unheard, by a side door.

With assumed carelessness, yet furtively watching, she made the circuit of the lily-pool, humming to herself. A quick leap and a light foot on the grass startled her for an in-

stant, then she laughed, for it was only Mr. Boffin, playing with his own dancing shadow.

Where Can He Be?

The sound of the piano had become very faint, though the windows were open and the wind was in the right direction. Isabel stopped at another bush, picked a few full-blown white roses, and sat down on a garden bench to remove the thorns.

"I wonder where he can be," she said to herself. "Surely he can't have gone home again." She listened, but there was no sound save the distant piano, and the abrupt, playful purr of Mr. Boffin, as he pounced upon a fallen white rose.

Changed Her Mind

Isabel put the flowers in her hair, consciously missing the mirror in which she was wont to observe the effect. "He must have gone in while I was coming down," she thought, "but I don't see why he should n't have gone straight in when he first came."

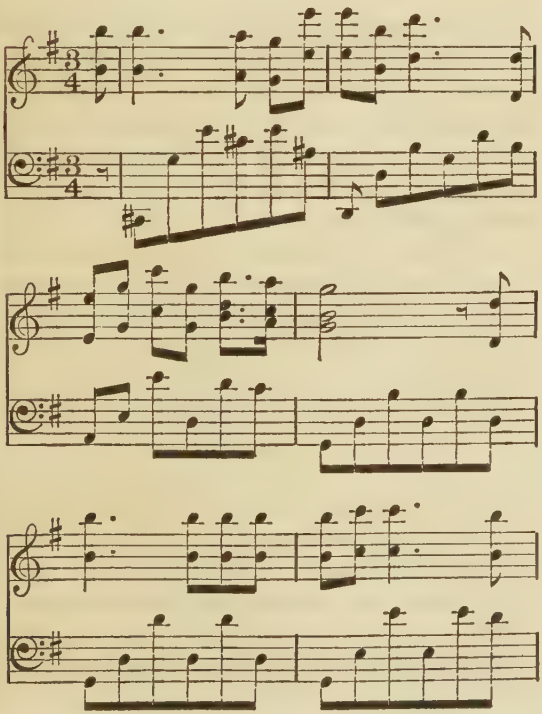
She decided to wait until he came to look for her, then as swiftly changed her mind. Rose was still playing.

Isabel hummed the melody to herself, not noting that she was off the key, and started slowly toward the house, by another path.

Allison was standing in the shadow of a

maple, listening to the music and drawing in deep breaths of the rose-scented air. The moon flooded the garden with enchantment, and a shaft of silver light, striking the sun-dial, made a shadow that was hours wrong. He smiled as he saw it, amiably crediting the moon with an accidental error, rather than a purposeful lie.

'An Accidental Error



"Shine for Me!"

Deeper and more vibrant, the woman within sent the cry of her heart into the night, where the only one who could answer it stood watching the shadow of the moon on the sun-dial and the spangled cobwebs on the grass. He picked a rose, put it into his button-hole, and turned toward the house.

A hushed sound, as of rustling silk, made him pause, then, at the head of the path, where another joined it, Isabel appeared, with white roses in her hair and the moon shining full upon her face. The spangles on her gown caught the light and broke it into a thousand tiny rainbows, surrounding her with faint iridescence.

The old, immortal hunger surged into his veins, the world-old joy made his senses reel. He steadied himself for a moment, then went to her, with his arms outstretched in pleading.

"Oh, Silver Girl," he whispered, huskily. "My Silver Girl! Tell me you 'll shine for me always!"

The Betrothal Kiss

The last chord ceased, full of yearning that was almost prayer. Then Isabel, cold as marble and passionless as snow, lifted her face for his betrothal kiss.

XIII

White Gloves

Isabel Tells Madame

WITH shyness that did not wholly conceal her youthful pride, Isabel told Madame, a few days later. The little old lady managed to smile and to kiss Isabel's soft cheek, murmuring the conventional hope for her happiness. Inwardly, she was far from calm, though deeply thankful that Rose did not happen to be in the room.

"You must make him very happy, dear," she said.

"I guess we 'll have a good time," returned Isabel, smothering a yawn. "It will be lots of fun to go all over the country and see all the big cities."

"I hope he will be successful," Madame continued. "He must be," she added, fervently.

"I suppose we shall be entertained a great deal," remarked Isabel. "He has written to Mamma, but she has n't had time to answer yet."

"I can vouch for my foster son," Madame replied.

"It is n't necessary," the girl went on, "and I told him so. Mamma never cares what I do, and she 'll be glad to get me off her hands. Would you mind if I were married here?"

Madame's heart throbbed with tender pity. "Indeed," she answered, warmly, "you shall have the prettiest wedding I can give you. Your mother will come, won't she?"

"Not if it would interfere with her lecture engagements. She 's going to lecture all next season on 'The Slavery of Marriage.' She says the wedding ring is a sign of bondage, dating back to the old days when a woman was her husband's property."

Madame Francesca's blue eyes filled with a sudden mist. Slowly she turned on her finger the worn band of gold that her gallant Captain had placed there ere he went to war. It carried still a deep remembrance too holy for speech. "Property," repeated the old lady, in a whisper. "Ah, but how dear it is to be owned!"

"I don't mind wearing it," said Isabel, with a patronising air, "but I want it as narrow as possible, so it won't interfere with my other rings, and, of course, I can take it off when I like."

"Of course, but I would be glad to have you so happily married, my dear, that you would n't want to take it off—ever."

"I 'll have to ask Mamma to send me some

She 's Too Old!

money for clothes," the girl went on, half to herself.

"Don't bother her with it," suggested the other, kindly. "Let me do it. Rose and I will enjoy making pretty things for a bride."

"I 'm afraid Cousin Rose would n't enjoy it," Isabel replied, with an unpleasant laugh. "Do you know," she added, confidentially, "I 've always thought Cousin Rose liked Allison—well, a good deal."

"She does," returned Madame, meeting the girl's eyes clearly, "and so do I. When you 're older, Isabel, you 'll learn to distinguish between a mere friendly interest and the grand passion."

"She 's too old, I know," Isabel continued, with the brutality of confident youth, "but sometimes older women do fall in love with young men."

"Why should n't they?" queried Madame, lightly, "as long as older men choose to fall in love with young women? As far as that goes, it would be no worse for Allison to marry Rose than it is for him to marry you."

"But," objected Isabel, "when he is sixty, she will be seventy, and he would n't care for her."

"And," returned Madame, rather sharply, "when he is forty, you will be only thirty and you may not care for him. There are always two sides to everything," she added, after a

pause, "and when we get so civilised that all women may be self-supporting if they choose, we may see a little advice to husbands on the way of keeping a wife's love, instead of the flood of nonsense that disfigures the periodicals now."

Begin Immediately

"They all say that woman makes the home," Isabel suggested, idly.

"But not alone. No woman can make a home alone. It takes two pairs of hands to make a home—one strong and the other tender, and two true hearts."

"I hope it won't take too long to make my clothes," answered Isabel, irrelevantly. "He says I must be ready by September."

"Then we must begin immediately. Write out everything you think of, and afterward we 'll go over the list together. Come into the library and begin now. There 's no time like the present."

"Do you think," Isabel inquired as she seated herself at the library table, "that I will have many presents?"

"Probably," answered Madame, briefly. "I 'll come back when you've finished your list."

She went up-stairs and knocked gently at the door of Rose's room, feeling very much as she did the day she went to Colonel Kent to tell him that the little mother of his new-born son was dead. Rose herself opened the door, somewhat surprised.

Battles to Fight

Madame went in, closed the door, then stood there for a moment, at a loss for words.

"Has it come?" asked Rose, in a low voice.

"Yes. Oh, Rose, my dear Rose!"

She put her arm around the younger woman and led her to the couch. Every hint of colour faded from Rose's face; her eyes were wide and staring, her lips scarcely pink. "I must go away," she murmured.

"Where, dearest?"

"Anywhere—oh, anywhere!"

"I know, dear, believe me, I know, but it never does any good to run away from things that must be faced sooner or later. We women have our battles to fight as well as the men who go to war, and the same truth applies to both—that only a coward will retreat under fire."

Rose sighed and clenched her hands together tightly.

"Once there was a ship," said Madame, softly, "sinking in mid-ocean, surrounded by fog. It had drifted far out of its course, and collided with a derelict. The captain ordered the band to play, the officers put on their dress uniforms and their white gloves. Another ship, that was drifting, too, signalled in answer to the music, and all were saved."

"That was possible—but there can be no signal for me."

"Perhaps not, but let 's put on our white gloves and order out the band."

The unconscious plural struck Rose with deep significance. "Did you—know, Aunt Francesca?"

"Yes, dear."

"For how long?"

"Always, I think."

"Did it seem—absurd, in any way?"

"Not at all. I was hoping for it, until the wind changed. And," she added, with her face turned away, "Colonel Kent was, too."

Some of the colour ebbed slowly back into the white, stricken face. "That makes me feel," Rose breathed, "as if I had n't been quite so foolish as I 've been thinking I was."

"Then keep the high heart, dear, for they must n't suspect."

"No," cried Rose sharply, "oh, no! Anything but that!"

"It 's hard to wear gloves when you don't want to," replied Madame, with seeming irrelevance, "but it 's easier when there are others. The Colonel will need them, too—this is going to be hard on him."

"Does—he—know?" whispered Rose, fearfully.

"No," answered Madame, laughing outright, "indeed he does n't. Did you ever know of a man discovering anything that was n't right under his nose?"

"And I am safe with—with——"

"With everybody but Isabel. She may be

The Colonel's Call

foolish, but she 's a woman, and even a woman can see around a corner."

"Thank you for telling me," said Rose, after a little; "for giving me time. It was like you."

"I 'm glad I could, but remember, I have n't told you, officially. Let her tell you herself."

Rose nodded. "Then I 'll come down just as soon as I can."

"With white gloves on, dear, and flags flying. Make your old aunt proud of you now, won't you?"

"I 'll try," she answered, humbly, then quickly closed the door.

Meanwhile Colonel Kent, most correctly attired, was making a formal call upon his prospective daughter-in-law, and the list had scarcely been begun. Isabel sat in the living room, trying not to show that she was bored. The Colonel had come in, ready to receive her into his house and his heart, but Isabel had shaken hands with him coolly, and accepted shrinkingly the fatherly kiss he stooped to bestow upon her forehead.

He had tried several preliminary topics of conversation, which had been met with chilling monosyllables, so he plunged into the heart of the subject, with inward trepidation.

"I told Allison this morning that I owed him my thanks for bringing me a daughter."

"Yes," said Isabel, placidly.

The Colonel Receives Orders

"The old house needs young voices and the sound of young feet," the Colonel went on.

Isabel began to speak, then hesitated and relapsed into silence. Mr. Boffin came in, purring loudly, and rubbed familiarly against the Colonel, leaving a thin coating of yellow hair.

"It seems to be the moulting season for cats," laughed the Colonel, observing the damage ruefully.

Isabel moved restlessly in her chair, but said nothing. The pause had become awkward when the Colonel rose to take his leave.

"I hope you may be happy," he said, gravely, "and make our old house happier for your coming."

"Oh," returned Isabel, quickly, "I had n't thought of that. I had n't thought of—of living there."

"The house is large," he ventured, puzzled.

"Mamma has always said," remarked Isabel, primly, "that no house was large enough for two families."

Colonel Kent managed to force a laugh. "You may be right," he answered. "At least, everything shall be arranged to your liking."

He had said good-bye and was on his way out, when Francesca came down from Rose's room. Seeing her, he waited for a moment.

The Blow Has Fallen

Isabel had gone into the library and closed the door.

"Whence this haste?" queried Madame, with a lightness which was just then difficult to assume. "Were you going without seeing me?"

"I had feared I would be obliged to," he returned, gallantly. "I was calling upon my future daughter-in-law," he added, in a low tone, as they went out on the veranda.

Madame sighed and sank gratefully into the chair he offered her. In the broad light of day, she looked old and worn.

"Well," continued the Colonel, with an effort to speak cheerfully, "the blow has fallen."

"So I hear," she rejoined, almost in a whisper. "What tremendous readjustments the heedless young may cause!"

"Yes, but we must n't deny them the right. The eternal sacrifice of youth to age is one of the most pitiful things in nature—human nature, that is. The animals know better."

"Would you remove all opportunity for the development of character?" she inquired, with a tinge of sarcasm.

"No, but I would n't deliberately furnish it. The world supplies it generously enough, I think. Allison did n't ask to be born," he went on, with a change of tone, "and those who brought him into the world are infinitely

more responsible to him than he is to them."

"One-sided," returned Madame, abruptly. "And, if so, it 's the only thing that is. What of the gift of life?"

"Nothing to speak of," he responded with a cynicism wholly new to her. "I would n't go back and live it over, would you?"

"No," she sighed, "I would n't. I don't believe anyone would, even the happiest."

"Too much character development?"

"Yes," she admitted, with a shamefaced flush. "You 'll have a chance to see, now. It will be right under your nose."

"No," he said, with a certain sad emphasis which did not escape her; "it won't. I shall be at a respectful distance."

"Why, Richard!" she cried, half rising from her chair; "what do you mean? Are n't you going to live with them in the old home?"

The Colonel shook his head.

"Why?" she demanded.

The Colonel raised his hand to his forehead in a mock salute. "Orders," he said, briefly. "From headquarters."

"Has Allison—" she began, in astonishment, but he interrupted her.

"No." He inclined his head suggestively toward the house, and she understood.

"The little brute," murmured Francesca. "Richard, believe me, I am ashamed."

The Signal

"Don't bother," he answered, kindly. "The boy must n't know. You always plan everything for me—where shall I live now?"

She leaned forward, her blue eyes shining. "Oh, Richard," she breathed, "if you only would—if you could—come to Rose and me! We 'd be so glad!"

There was no mistaking her sincerity, and the Colonel's fine old face illumined with pleasure. Merely to be wanted, anywhere, brings a certain satisfaction.

"I 'll come," he returned, promptly. "How good you are! How good you 've always been! I often wonder what I should ever have done without you."

He turned away and, lightly as a passing cloud, a shadow crossed his face. Madame saw how hard it would be to part from his son, and, only in lesser degree, his old home.

"Richard," she said, "a ship was sinking once in a fog, miles out of its course. The captain ordered the band to play and all the officers put on their dress uniforms. Another ship, also drifting, signalled in answer to the music and all were saved."

The Colonel rose and offered his hand in farewell. "Thank you, Francesca," he answered, deeply moved. "I put on my white gloves the day you came to tell me. I thank you now for the signal—and for saving me."

She watched him as he went down the road,

All in White Gloves

tall, erect, and soldierly, in spite of his three-score and ten. "Three of us," she said to herself, "all in white gloves." The metaphor appealed to her strongly.

She did not go in until Isabel appeared in the doorway, list in hand, and prettily perplexed over the problem of clothes. Madame slipped it into the chatelaine bag that hung from her belt. "We 'll go over it with Rose," she said. "She knows more about clothes than I do."

"Have you told Cousin Rose?"

"No," answered Madame, avoiding the girl's eyes. "It 's your place to tell her—not mine."

When Rose came down to dinner that night, she was gorgeously attired in her gown of old-gold satin, adorned with gold lace. The last yellow roses of the garden were twined in her dark hair, and the rouge-stick, that faithful friend of unhappy woman, had given a little needed colour to her cheeks and lips, for the first time in her life.

"Cousin Rose," began Isabel, a little abashed by the older woman's magnificence, "I 'm engaged—to Allison."

"Really?" cried Rose, with well-assumed astonishment. "Come here and let me kiss the bride-to-be. You must make him very happy," she said, then added, softly: "I pray that you may."

"Everybody seems to think of him and not of me," Isabel returned, a little fretfully.

The Hardest Still to Come

"That 's what Aunt Francesca said, and Allison's father seemed to think more about my making Allison happy than he did about my being happy myself."

"That 's because the only way to win happiness is to give it," put in Madame. "The more we give, the more we have."

Conversation lagged at dinner, and became, as often, a monologue by Madame. While they were finishing their coffee, they heard Allison's well-known step outside.

"I wonder why he had to come so early," complained Isabel. "I wanted to change my dress. I did n't have time before dinner."

"He 'll never know it," Madame assured her. We 'll excuse you dear, if you 're through. Don't keep him waiting."

When the dining-room door closed, Rose turned to Madame. "Did I—— "

"Most wonderfully."

"But the hardest part is still to come," she breathed, sadly.

> "'I was ever a fighter, so one fight more.
> The best and the last';"

Madame quoted, encouragingly.

Rose smiled—a little wan smile—as she pushed back her chair. "Perhaps," she said, "the 'peace out of pain' may follow me."

She went, with faltering step, toward the other room, inwardly afraid. Another hand

met hers, with a reassuring clasp. "One step more, Rose. Now then, forward, march, all flags unfurled."

A Kiss

When she went in, Allison came to meet her with outstretched hands. He had changed subtly, since she saw him last. Had light been poured over him, it would have changed him in much the same way.

"Golden Rose," he said, taking both her hands in his, "tell me you are glad—say that you wish me joy."

Her eyes met his clearly. "I do," she smiled. "There is no one in the world for whom I wish joy more than I do for you."

"And I say the same," chimed in Madame, who had closely followed Rose.

"Dear little foster mother," said Allison, tenderly, putting a strong arm around her. He had not yet released Rose's hand, nor did he note that it was growing cold. "I owe you everything," he went on; "even Isabel."

He kissed her, then, laughing, turned to Rose. "May I?" he asked. Without waiting for an answer, he turned her face to his, and kissed her on the lips.

Cold as ice and shaken to the depths of her soul, Rose stumbled out of the room, murmuring brokenly of a forgotten letter which must be immediately written. Madame lingered for the space of half an hour, talking brightly of everything under the sun, then followed

A Dream

Rose, turning in the doorway as she went out, to say: "Can't you even thank me for leaving you alone?"

"Bless her," said Allison, fondly. "What sweet women they are!"

"Yes," answered Isabel, spitefully, "especially Rose."

He laughed heartily. "What a little goose you are, sweetheart. Kiss me, dear—dearest."

"I won't," she flashed back, stubbornly, nor would she, until at last, by superior strength, he took his lover's privilege from lips that refused to yield.

That night he dreamed that, for a single exquisite instant, Isabel had answered him, giving him love for love. Then, strangely enough, Isabel became Rose, in a gown of gold, with golden roses twined in her hair.

XIV

The Thirtieth of June

Absorbed in His Own Thoughts

DINNER that night had been rather a silent affair at Kent's, as well as at Madame Bernard's. Being absorbed in his own thoughts, Allison did not realise how unsociable he was, nor that the old man across the table from him perceived that they had reached the beginning of the end.

When Allison spoke, it was always of Isabel. Idealised in her lover's sight, she stood before him as the one "perfect woman, nobly planned," predestined, through countless ages, to be his mate. Colonel Kent merely agreed with him in monosyllables until Allison became conscious that his father did not wholly share his enthusiasm.

"I wish you knew her, Dad," he said, regretfully. "You 'll love her when you do."

"I 'm willing to," answered the Colonel, shortly. "I called on her this afternoon," he added, after a brief pause.

Allison's face illumined. "Was she there? Did you see her?"

Not Always

"Yes."

"Is n't she the loveliest thing that was ever made?"

"I 'm not prepared to go as far as that," smiled the Colonel, "but she is certainly a very pretty girl."

"She 's beautiful," returned Allison, with deep conviction.

The Colonel forebore to remind him that love brings beauty with it, or that the beauty which endures comes from the soul within.

"Just think, Dad," Allison was saying, "how lovely she 'll be at that end of the table, with me across from her and you at her right."

The Colonel shook his head, then cleared his throat. "Not always, lad," he said, kindly, "but perhaps, sometimes—as a guest."

Allison's fork dropped with a sharp clatter on his plate. "Dad! What do you mean?"

"No house is large enough for two families," repeated the Colonel, with an unconscious, parrot-like accent.

"Why, Dad! We 've always stood together—surely you won't desert me now?"

The old man's eyes softened with mist. He could not trust himself to meet the clear, questioning gaze of his son.

"I can't understand," Allison went on, doubtfully. "Is it possible—could she—did—Isabel——?"

"No" said the Colonel, firmly, still avoiding the questioning eyes. "She did n't!"

"Of course she did n't," returned Allison, fully satisfied. "She could n't—she 's not that kind. What a brute I was even to think it! But why, Dad? Please tell me why!"

"Francesca asked me this afternoon if I would come to her and Rose, after the—afterwards, you know, and I promised."

"If you promised, I suppose that settles it," remarked Allison, gloomily, "but I wish you had n't. I can understand that they would want you, too, for of course they 'll be desperately lonely after Isabel goes away."

A certain peace crept into the old man's sore heart. Surely there was something to live for still.

"I hope you did n't tell Aunt Francesca you 'd stay there always," Allison was saying, anxiously.

"No," answered the Colonel, with a smile; "there was no limit specified."

"Then we 'll consider it only a visit and a short one at that—just until they get a little used to Isabel's being away. This is your rightful place, Dad, and Isabel and I both want you—don't ever forget that!"

When Allison had gone in search of his beloved, the Colonel sat on the veranda alone, accustomed, now, to evenings spent thus. His garden promised well, he thought, having

An Untruth

produced two or three sickly roses in the very first season. The shrubs and trees that had survived ten years of neglect had been pruned and tied and would doubtless do well next year, if Isabel——

"I hope he 'll never find out," the Colonel said to himself. Then he remembered that, for the first time in his life, he had lied to his son, and took occasion to observe the highly spectacular effect of an untruth from an habitually truthful person.

"He never doubted me, not for an instant," mused the Colonel, "but it 's just as well that I 'm going. She could probably manage it, if we lived in the same house, so that I 'd have to tell at least one lie a day, and I 'm not an expert. Perfection might come with practice—I 've known it to—but I 'm too old to begin."

He was deeply grateful to Francesca for her solution of the problem that confronted him. It had appeared and been duly solved in the space of half an hour. She had been his good angel for more than thirty years. It might be very pleasant to live there, after he became accustomed to the change, and with Allison so near—why, he could n't be half as lonely as he was now. So his thoughts drifted into a happier channel and he was actually humming an old song to himself when he heard Allison's step, almost at midnight, on the road just beyond the gate.

He went in quietly, closed the door, and was in his own room when Allison's latch-key rattled in the lock. The Colonel took pains not to be heard moving about, but it was unnecessary, for Allison's heart was beating in time with its own music, and surging with the nameless rapture that comes but once.

Down in the moon-lit, dream-haunted garden, Allison waited for Isabel, as the First Man might have waited for the First Woman, in another garden, countless ages ago. Stars were mirrored in the lily-pool; the waning moon swung low. The roses had gone, except a few of the late-blooming sort, but the memory of their fragrance lingered still in the velvet dusk.

No music came from the quiet house, for Rose had not touched the piano since That Night. It stood out in his remembrance in capitals, as it did in hers, for widely different reasons. Only Isabel, cherishing no foolish sentiment as to dates and places, could have forgotten That Night.

With a lover's fond fancy, Allison had written a note to Isabel, asking her to meet him in the garden by the lily-pool, at nine, and to wear the silver-spangled gown. It was already past the hour and he had begun to be impatient, though he was sure she had received the note.

A cobweb in the grass at his feet shone

Isabel's Annoyance

faintly afar—like Isabel's spangles, he thought. A soft-winged wayfarer of the night brushed lightly against his cheek in passing, and he laughed aloud, to think that a grey moth should bring the memory of a kiss. Then, with a swift sinking of the heart, he remembered Isabel's unvarying coldness. Never for an instant had she answered him as Rose——

"Nonsense," he muttered to himself, angrily. "What an unspeakable cad I am!"

There was a light step on the path and Isabel appeared out of the shadows. She was holding up her skirts and seemed annoyed. In the first glance Allison noted that she was not wearing the spangled gown.

She submitted to his eager embrace and endured his kiss; even the blindest lover could not have said more. Yet her coldness only thrilled him to the depths with love of her, as has been the way of men since the world began.

"I don't understand this foolishness," she said, fretfully, as she released herself from his encircling arm. "It 's damp and chilly out here, and I 'll get wet and take cold."

"It is n't damp, darling, and you can't take cold. Why did n't you wear the spangles?"

"Do you suppose I want to spoil my best gown dragging it through the wet grass?"

"The grass is n't wet, and, anyhow, you

have n't been on it—only on the path. Come over here to the bench and sit down."

"I don't want to. I want to go in."

"All right, but not just yet. I 'll carry you, if you 're afraid of dampness." Before she could protest, he had picked her up and laughingly seated her on the bench at the edge of the lily-pool.

Isabel smoothed her rumpled hair. "You've mussed me all up," she complained. "Why can't we go in? Aunt Francesca and Rose are upstairs."

"Listen, sweetheart. Please be patient with me just a minute, won't you? I 've brought you your engagement ring."

"Oh," cried Isabel, delightedly. "Let me see it!"

"I want to tell you about it first. You remember, don't you, that the first night I came here, you were wearing a big silver pin—a turquoise matrix, set in dull silver?"

"I 've forgotten."

"Well, I have n't. Someway, it seemed to suit you as jewels seldom suit anybody, and you had it on the other night when you promised to marry me. Both times you were wearing the spangled gown, and that 's why I asked for it to-night, and why I 've had your engagement ring made of a turquoise."

Isabel murmured inarticulately, but he went on, heedlessly: "It 's made of silver because

Only the Beginning

you 're my Silver Girl, the design is all roses because it was in the time of roses, and it 's a turquoise for reasons I 've told you. Our initials and the date are inside."

Allison slipped it on her finger and struck a match that she might see it plainly. Isabel turned it on her finger listlessly.

"Very pretty," she said, in a small, thin voice, after an awkward pause.

"Why, dearest," he cried, "don't you like it?"

"It 's well enough," she answered, slowly, "but not for an engagement ring. Everybody else has diamonds. I thought you cared enough for me to give me a diamond," she said, reproachfully.

"I do," he assured her, "and you shall have diamonds—as many as I can give you. Why, sweet, this is only the beginning. There 's a long life ahead of us, is n't there? Do you think I 'm never going to give my wife any jewels?"

"Aunt Francesca and Rose put you up to this," said Isabel, bitterly. "They never want me to have anything."

"They know nothing whatever about it," he replied, rather coldly, taking it from her finger as he spoke. "Listen, Isabel. Would you rather have a diamond in your engagement ring?"

"Of course. I 'd be ashamed to have any-

body know that this was my engagement ring."

"All right," said Allison, with defiant cheerfulness. "You shall have just exactly what you want, and, to make sure, I 'll take you with me when I go to get it. I 'm sorry I made such a mistake."

There was a flash of blue and silver in the faint light, and a soft splash in the lily-pool. "There," he went on, "it 's out of your way now."

"You did n't need to throw it away," she said, icily. "I did n't say I did n't want it, nor that I would n't wear it. I only said I wanted a diamond."

"It could be found, I suppose," he replied, thoughtfully, ashamed of his momentary impulse. "If the pool were drained——"

"That would cost more than the ring is worth," Isabel interrupted. "Come, let 's go in."

He was about to explain that a very good-sized pool could be drained for the price of the ring, but fortunately thought better of it, and was bitterly glad, now, that he had thrown it away.

In the house they talked of other things, but the thrust still lingered in his consciousness, unforgotten.

"How 's your father?" inquired Isabel, in a conversational pause, as she could think of nothing else to say.

Anything within Reason

"All right, I guess. Why?"

"I have n't seen him lately. He has n't been over since the day he called on me."

"Guess I have n't thought to ask him to come along. Dad is possessed just at present by a very foolish idea. They 've told you, have n't they?"

"No. Told me what?"

"Why, that after we 're married, he 's to come over here to live with Aunt Francesca and Rose, and give us the house to ourselves."

"I had n't heard," she replied, indifferently.

"I don't know when I 've felt so badly about anything," Allison resumed. "We 've always been together and we 've been more like two chums than father and son. It 's like taking my best friend away from me, but I know he 'll come back to us, if you ask him to."

"Probably," she assented, coldly. "I suppose we 'll be in town for the Winters, won't we, and only live here in the Summer?"

"I don't know, dear; we 'll see. I 've got to go to see my manager very soon, and Dad asked me to find out what you wanted for a wedding present. I 'm to help him select it."

"Can I have anything I choose?" she queried, keenly interested now.

"Anything within reason," he smiled. "I 'm sorry we 're not millionaires."

"Could I have an automobile?"

"Perhaps. What kind?"

"A big red touring car, with room for four or five people in it?"

"I 'll tell him. It would be rather nice to have one, would n't it?"

"Indeed it would," she cried, clapping her hands. "Oh, Allison, do persuade him to get it, won't you?"

"I won't have to, if he can. I 've never had to persuade my father into anything he could do for me."

When he went home, Isabel kissed him, of her own accord, for the first time. It was a cold little kiss, accompanied with a whispered plea for the red automobile, but it set his heart to thumping wildly, and made him forget the disdained turquoise, that lay at the bottom of the lily-pool.

Within a few days, Isabel was the happy possessor of an engagement ring with a diamond in it—a larger, brighter stone than she had ever dreamed of having. Colonel Kent had also readily promised the automobile, though he did not tell Allison that he should be obliged to sell some property in order to acquire a really fine car. It took until the end of the month to make the necessary arrangements, but on the afternoon of the thirtieth, a trumpeting red monster, bright with brass, drew up before the Kent's door, having come out from town on its own power.

The First Ride

As the two men had taken a brief tour over the wonderful roads of France, with Allison at the wheel, he felt no hesitation in trying an unfamiliar car. The old throb of exultation came back when the monster responded to his touch and chugged out of the driveway on its lowest speed.

He turned back to wave his hand at his father, who stood smiling on the veranda, with the chauffeur beside him. "I 'll get Isabel," he called, "then come back for you."

He reached Madame Bernard's without accident and Isabel, almost wild with joy, ran out of the gate to meet him and climbed in. Only Rose, from the shelter of her curtains, saw them as they went away.

"Where shall we go?" Isabel asked. She was hatless and the sun dwelt lovingly upon her shining black hair.

"Back for Dad. He 's waiting for us. Do you like it, dear?"

"Indeed I do. Oh, so much! It was lovely of him, was n't it? He would n't care, would he, if we took a little ride just by ourselves before we went back for him?"

"Of course not, but we can't go far and we 'll have to go fast."

"I love to go fast. I 've never been fast enough yet. I wonder if the Crosbys have got their automobile?"

"I heard so, but I have n't seen it. I under-

stand that Romeo is learning to drive it in the narrow boundaries of the yard."

"What day of the month is it?"

"The thirtieth. There 's less than three months to wait now, darling—then you 'll be mine, all mine."

"Then this is the day the Crosbys were going to celebrate—it 's the anniversary of their uncle 's death. I 'm glad we 've got our automobile. Can't we go by there? It 's only three miles, and I 'd love to have them see us go by, at full speed."

Obediently, Allison turned into the winding road which led to Crosbys', and, to please Isabel, drove at the third speed. Once under way, the road spun dustily backward under the purring car, and the wind in their faces felt like the current of a stream.

"Oh," cried Isabel, rapturously; "is n't it lovely!"

"I 'm almost afraid to go so fast, dear. If there should be another car on this road, we might collide at some of these sharp turns."

"But there is n't. There 's not another automobile in this sleepy little town, except the Crosbys'. It is n't likely that they 're out in theirs now, on this road."

But, as it happened, they were. After some difficulties at the start, Romeo had engineered "The Yellow Peril" out through a large break in the fence. The twins wore their

Romie Loses Control

brown suits with tan leather trimmings, and, as planned long ago, the back seat of the machine was partially filled with raw meat of the sort most liked by Romeo's canine dependents.

Two yellow flags fluttered from the back of the driver's seat. One had the initials "C. T." in black, on the other, in red, was "The Yellow Peril." The name of the machine and the monogram were strikingly in evidence on the doors and at the back, where a choice cut of roast beef, uncooked, dangled temptingly by a strong cord.

Just before they started, Juliet unfastened the barn door and freed nineteen starving dogs, all in collars suited to the general colour scheme of the automobile, and bearing the initials: "C. T." When they sniffed the grateful odour borne on the warm June wind, they plunged after the machine with howls and yelps of delight. Only Minerva remained behind, having five new puppies to care for.

"Oh, Romie, Romie!" shouted Juliet, in ecstasy. "They 're coming! See!"

Romeo looked back for the fraction of an instant, saw that they were, indeed, "coming," and then discovered that he had lost control of the machine. "Sit tight," he said, to Juliet, between clenched teeth.

"I am," she screamed, gleefully. "Oh, Romie, if uncle could only see us now!"

"Uncle's likely to see us very soon," re-

torted Romeo grimly, "unless I can keep her on the road."

But Juliet was absorbed in the joy of the moment and did not hear. A cloud of dust, through which gleamed brass and red, appeared on the road ahead of them, having rounded the curve at high speed. At the same instant, Allison saw just beyond him, the screaming fantasy of colour and sound.

"Jump!" he cried to Isabel. "Jump for your life!"

She immediately obeyed him, falling in a little white heap at the roadside. He rose, headed the machine toward the ditch at the right, and jumped to the left, falling face down in the road with his hands outstretched. Before he could stir, the other machine roared heavily over him, grazing his left hand and crushing it into the deep dust.

There was almost an instant of unbelievable agony, then, mercifully, darkness and oblivion.

XV

"How She Will Come to Me"

Darkness and Silence

THE darkness swayed but did not lift. There was a strange rhythm in its movement, as though it were the sea, but there was no sound. Black shadows crept upon him, then slowly ebbed away. At times he was part of the darkness, at others, separate from it, yet lying upon it and wholly sustained by it.

At intervals, the swaying movement changed. His feet sank slowly in distinct pulsations until he stood almost upright, then his head began to sink and his feet to rise. When his head was far down and his feet almost directly above him, the motion changed again and he came back gradually to the horizontal, sinking back with one heart-beat and rising with the next—always a little higher.

How still it was! The silence of eternity was in that all compassing dark, which reached to the uttermost boundaries of space. It was hollow and empty, save for him, rising and falling, rising and falling, in a series of regular move-

The Purple Shadow

ments corresponding almost exactly to the ticking of a watch.

A faint, sickening odour crept through the darkness, followed by a black overwhelming shadow which threatened to engulf him in its depths. Still swaying, he waited for it calmly. All at once it was upon him, but swiftly receded. He seemed to sway backward out of it, and as he looked back upon it, gathering its forces for another attack, he saw that it was different from the darkness upon which he lay—that, instead of black, it was a deep purple.

The odour persisted and almost nauseated him. It was vaguely familiar, though he had never before come into intimate contact with it. Was it the purple shadow, that ebbed and flowed so strangely upon his dark horizon, growing to a brighter purple with each movement?

The purple grew very bright, then deepened to blue—almost black. Dancing tongues of flame shot through the darkness, as he swung through it, up and down, like a ship moved by a heavy ground swell. The flames took colour and increased in number. Violet, orange, blue, green, and yellow flickered for an instant, then disappeared.

The darkness was not quite so heavy, but it still swayed. The javelins of flame shot through it continually, making a web of iri-

A Woman in White

descence. Then the purple shadow approached majestically and put them out. When it retreated, they came again, but the colour was fainter.

The yellow flames darted toward him from every conceivable direction, stabbing him like needles. In this light, the purple shadow changed to blue and began to grow brighter. The sickening odour was so strong now that he could scarcely breathe. The blue shadow warred with the yellow flames, but could not put them out. He saw now that the shadow was his friend and the flames were a host of enemies.

All the little stabbing lights suddenly merged into one. He was surrounded by fire that burned him as he swayed back and forth, and the cool shadows were gone. The light grew intense and terrible, but he could not lift his hand to shade his eyes. Slowly the orange deepened to scarlet in which he spun around giddily among myriads of blood-red disks. The scarlet grew brighter and brighter until it became a white, streaming light. All at once the swaying stopped.

The intensity of the white light was agreeably tempered by a grey mist. Through the vapour, he saw the outlines of his own chiffonier, across the room. A woman in spotless white moved noiselessly about. Even though she did not look at him, he felt a certain friendliness

In a Cloud

toward her. She seemed to have been with him while he swayed through the shadow and it was pleasant to know that he had not been alone.

On the table near the window, his violin lay as he had left it. The case was standing in a corner and his music stand had toppled over. The torn sheets of music rustled idly on the floor, and he wondered, fretfully, why the woman in white did not pick them up.

As if in answer to his thought, she stooped, and gathered them together, quietly sorting the pages and putting them into the open drawer that held his music. She closed the drawer and folded up his music stand without making a sound. She seemed far removed from him, like someone from another world.

Cloud surrounded her, but he caught glimpses of her through it occasionally. She took up his violin, very carefully, put it into its case, and carried it out of the room. He did not care very much, but it seemed rather an impolite thing to do. He knew that he would not have stolen a violin when the owner was in the same room.

Soon she came back and he was reassured. She had not stolen it after all. She might have broken it, for she seemed to feel very sorry about something. She was wiping her eyes with a bit of white, as women always did when they cried.

Worse than Shadows and Fire

It was not necessary for her to cry, on account of one broken violin, for he had thousands of them—Stradivarius, Amati, Cremona; everything. Some of them were highly coloured and very rare on that account. He had only to go to his storehouse, present a ticket, and choose whatever he liked—red, green, yellow, or even striped.

Everybody who played the violin needed a great many of them, for the different moods of music. It was obvious that the dark brown violin with which he played slow, sad music could not be used for the Hungarian Dances. He had a special violin for those, striped with barbaric colour.

The woman who had broken one of his violins stood at the window with her back toward him. Her shoulders shook and from time to time she lifted the bit of white to her eyes. It was annoying, he thought; even worse than the shadows and the fire. He was about to call to her and suggest, ironically, that she had cried enough and that the flowers would be spoiled if they got too wet, when someone called, from the next room: "Miss Rose!"

She turned quickly, wiped her eyes once more, and, without making a sound, went out on the white cloud that surrounded her half way to her waist.

He tried to change his position a little and felt his own bed under him. His body was

Every Sense Acute

stiff and sore, but he had the use of it, except his left arm. Try as he might, he could not move it, for it was weighted down and it hurt terribly.

"Miss Rose, Miss Rose, Miss Rose, Miss Rose." The words beat hard in his ears like a clock ticking loudly. The accent was on the "Miss"—the last word was much fainter. "Rose Miss" was wrong, so the other must be right, except for the misplaced accent. Did the accent always come on the first beat of a measure? He had forgotten, but he would ask the man at the storehouse when he went to get the striped violin for the Hungarian Dances.

His left hand throbbed with unbearable agony. The room began to spin slowly on its axis. There was no mist now, or even a shadow, and every sense was abnormally acute. The objects in the whirling room were phenomenally clear; even a scratch on the front of his chiffonier stood out distinctly.

He could hear a clock ticking, though there was no clock in his room. Afar was the sound of women sobbing—two of them. Above it a strange voice said, distinctly: "There is not one chance in a thousand of saving his hand. If I had nurses, I would amputate now, before he recovers consciousness."

The words struck him with the force of a blow, though he did not fully realise what they meant. The pain in his left arm and the sick-

The Weary Round

ening odour nauseated him. The cool black shadow drowned the objects in the room and crept upon him stealthily. Presently he was swaying again, up and down, up and down, in the all-encompassing, all-hiding dark.

So it happened that he did not hear Colonel Kent's ringing answer: "You shall not amputate until every great surgeon in the United States has said that it is absolutely necessary. I leave on the next train, and shall send them and keep on sending until there are no more to send. Until a man comes who thinks there is a chance of saving it, you are in charge —after that, it is his case."

Day by day, a continuous procession came to the big Colonial house. Allison became accustomed to the weary round of darkness, pain, sickening odours, strange faces, darkness, and so on, endlessly, without pity or pause.

The woman in white had mysteriously vanished. In her place were two, in blue and white, with queer, unbecoming caps. They were there one at a time, always; never for more than a few minutes were they together. When the fierce, hot agony became unendurable for even a moment longer, one of them would lean over him with a bit of shining silver in her hand, and stab him sharply for an instant. Then, with incredible quickness, came peace.

Once, when two strange men had come to-

Two Questions

gether, and had gone into the adjoining room, he caught disconnected fragments of conversation. "Hypersensitive—impossible—not much longer—interesting case." He wondered, as he began to sway in the darkness again, what "hypersensitive" meant. Surely, he used to know.

Still, it did not matter—nothing mattered now. In the brief intervals of consciousness, he began to wonder what he had been doing just before this happened, whatever it was. It took him days to piece out the disconnected memories past the whirling room, the woman in white and the creeping shadows, to the red touring car and Isabel.

His heart throbbed painfully, held though it was by some iron hand, icy cold, in a pitiless clutch. Weakly, he summoned the blue and white woman who sat in a low chair across his room. She came quickly, and put her ear very close to his lips that she might hear what he said.

"Was—she—hurt?"

"No," said the blue and white woman, very kindly. "Only slightly bruised."

The next day he summoned her again. As before, she bent very low to catch the gasping words: "Where is—my—father?"

"He had to go to town on business. He will come back just as soon as he can."

"He—is—dead," said Allison, with diffi-

culty. "Nothing else—could take—him—away—now."

"No," she assured him, "you must believe me. He's all right. Everybody else is all right and we hope you soon will be."

"No use—talking of—it," he breathed, hoarsely. "I know."

Singly, by twos and even threes, the strange men continued to come from the City. Allison submitted wearily to the painful examinations that seemed so unnecessary. Some of the men seemed kind, even sympathetic. Others were cold and impassive, like so many machines. Still others, and these were in the majority, were almost brutal.

It was one of the latter sort who one day drew a chair up to the side of the bed with a scraping noise that made the recumbent figure quiver from head to foot. The man's face was almost colourless, his bulging blue eyes were cold and fish-like, distorted even more by the strong lenses of his spectacles.

"Better have it over with," he suggested. "I can do it now."

"Do what?" asked Allison, with difficulty.

"Amputate your hand. There's no chance."

The blue and white young woman then on duty came forward. "I beg your pardon, Doctor, but Colonel Kent left strict orders not to operate without his consent."

The strange man disdained to answer the

Delusion

nurse, but turned to Allison again. "Do you know where your father can be reached by wire?"

"My father—is dead," Allison insisted. He closed his eyes and would answer no more questions. In the next room, he heard the nurse and the doctor talking in low tones that did not carry. Only one word rose above the murmur: "delusion."

Allison repeated it to himself as he sank into the darkness again, wondering what it meant and of whom they were speaking.

Slowly he recovered from the profound shock, but his hand did not improve. He had an idea that the ceaseless bandaging and unbandaging were dangerous as well as painful, but said nothing. He knew that his career had come to its end before it had really begun, but it did not seem to affect him in any way. He considered it unemotionally and impersonally, when he thought of it at all.

Two more men came together. One was brutal, the other merely cold. They shook their heads and went away. A few days later, a man of the rare sort came; a gentle, kindly, sympathetic soul, who seemed human and real.

After the examination was finished, Allison asked, briefly: "Any chance?"

The kindly man hesitated for an instant, then told the truth. "I 'm afraid not."

The Message

The nurse happened to be out of the room, none the less, Allison motioned to him to come closer. Almost in a whisper he said: "Can you give me anything that will make me strong enough to write half a dozen lines?"

"Could no one else write it for you?"

"No one."

"Could n't I take the message?"

"Could anyone take a message for me to the girl I was going to marry—now?"

"I understand," said the other, gently. "We 'll see. You must make it very brief."

When the nurse came back, they gave him a pencil, propped a book up before him, and fastened a sheet of paper to it by a rubber band. After the powerful stimulant the doctor administered had begun to take effect, Allison managed to write, in a very shaky, almost illegible hand:

"My Dearest:

"My left hand will have to come off. As I can't ask you to marry a cripple, the only honourable thing for me to do is to release you from our engagement. Don't think I blame you. Good-bye, darling, and may God bless you.

"A. K."

The effort exhausted him greatly, but the thing was done. The nurse folded it, put it into an envelope, sealed it, and took the pencil from him.

Realising the Situation

"You 'll let me address it, won't you?" she asked.

"Yes. Miss Isabel Ross. Anyone in the house can tell you where—anyone will take it to her. Thank you," he added, speaking to the doctor.

That night, for the first time, the situation began to affect him personally. In the hours after midnight, as the forces of the physical body ebbed toward the lowest point, those of the mind seemed to increase. Staring at the low night light, that by its feeble flicker exorcised the thousand phantoms that beset him, he could think clearly. In a rocking chair, across the room, the night nurse dozed, with a white shawl wrapped around her. He could hear her deep, regular breathing as she slept.

His father was dead—he knew that for an absolute fact, and wondered why the two kind women and the endless, varying procession of men should so persistently lie to him about this when they were willing to tell him the truth about everything else.

He also knew that, sooner or later, his left hand would be amputated and that his career would come to an inglorious end—indeed, the end had already come. The ordeal painfully shadowed upon his horizon was only the final seal. Fortunately there was money enough for everything—he would want pitifully little for the rest of his life.

Gentle Ministry

His life stretched out before him in a waste of empty years. He was thirty, now, and his father had lived until well past seventy; might have lived many years more had he not died when his heart broke over the misfortunes of his idolised son. He could remember the rumble of the carriage wheels the night of the funeral. The nurse had dozed in her chair just as she was dozing now, while downstairs they carried his father out of the house in a black casket and buried him. It was all as clear as though it had happened yesterday, instead of ages ago.

A clock, somewhere near by, chimed three quick, silvery strokes. With the last stroke, the clock in the kitchen struck three, also, in a different tone and with an annoying briskness of manner. As the echo died away, the old grandfather's clock on the landing boomed out three portentously solemn chimes. It was followed almost immediately by a cheery, impertinent little clock, insisting that it was four and almost time for sunrise.

The nurse stirred in her chair, yawned, and came over to the bed. She straightened the blankets with a practised hand, changed his hot pillow for a fresh one, brought him a drink of cool water, and went back to her chair without having said a word. The gentle ministry comforted him insensibly. What magic there was in the touch of a woman's hand! But, in the

Hope Dawns

long grey years ahead, there would be no woman, unless—Isabel——

Sometime that afternoon, or early in the evening, she had received his note. It was not strange that they had not allowed her to come to see him, because no one had seen him but the doctors and nurses. Even Aunt Francesca, whom he had known all his life, had not darkened his open door.

But now, Isabel would come—she could not help but come. With the passing of the fateful hour, strength began to return slowly. She would come to-morrow, and every tick of the clock brought to-morrow a second nearer.

A steadily increasing warmth came into his veins and thawed the ice around his heart. The cold hand that had held it so long mercifully loosened its fingers. He turned his face toward the Eastern window, that he might watch for the first faint glow.

A single long, deepening shadow struck across the far horizon like the turning out of a light. Almost immediately, the distant East brightened. Day was coming—the sun, and Isabel.

With the first hint of colour, hope dawned in his soul, changing to certainty as the light increased. It was not in the way of things that he, who had always had everything, should at one fell stroke be left desolate.

A Compensation

Out of the wreckage there was one thing he might keep—Isabel.

He laughed at the thought that she would accept her release. What would he have done he asked himself, were it she instead of him? Could mutilation, or even death, change his love for her? He was equally sure that hers could not be changed.

It was fortunate that she was saved—that it was he instead of Isabel. She had pretty hands—such dear hands as men have loved and kissed since, back in the garden, the First Woman gave hers to the First Man, that he might lead her wheresoever he would.

In the midst of the wreckage, he perceived a divine compensation, for Isabel would not fail him—she could not fail him now. Transfigured by tenderness, her coldness changed to the utmost yielding, to-morrow would bring him his goddess, a deeply-loving woman at last.

"How she will come to me," he said to himself, feeling, in fancy, her soft arms around him, and her warm lips on his, while the life-current flowed steadily from her to him and made him a man again, not a weakling. His heart beat with a joy that was almost pain, for he could feel her intoxicating nearness even now. Perhaps her sweet eyes would overflow with the greatness of her love and her tears would fall upon his face when she knelt beside him, to lay her head upon his breast.

"How she will come to me!" he breathed, in ecstasy. "Ah, how she will come!"

And so, smiling, he slept, as the first shaft of sun that brought his dear To-Morrow fell full upon his face.

Sweet Sleep

XVI

How Isabel Came

A Martyr

MADAME BERNARD and Rose were so deeply affected by Allison's misfortune that they scarcely took note of Isabel's few bruises, greatly to that young woman's disgust. She chose to consider herself in the light of a martyr and had calmly received the announcement that Allison's left hand would probably have to be amputated.

None of them had seen him, though the two older women were ready to go at any hour of the day or night they might be needed or asked for. Isabel affected a sprained ankle and limped badly when anyone was looking. Once or twice she had been seen to walk almost as usual, though she did not know it.

The upper hall, and, occasionally, the other parts of the house, smelled of the various liniments and lotions with which she anointed herself. She scorned the suggestion that she should stay in bed, for she was quite comfortable upon a couch, in her most becoming negli-

Two Notes

gee, with a novel and a box of chocolates to bear her company.

At first, she had taken her meals in her own room, but, finding that it was more pleasant to be downstairs with the others for luncheon and dinner, managed to go up and down the long flight of stairs twice each day.

Placid as she was, the table was not a cheerful place, for the faces of the other two were haggard and drawn, and neither made more than a pretence of eating. Daily bulletins came from the other house as to Allison's condition, and Madame was in constant communication by telegraph with Colonel Kent. She kept him reassured as much as possible, and did not tell him of Allison's ineradicable delusion that his father was dead.

Allison's note was given to Isabel at luncheon the day after it was written, having been delayed in delivery the night before until after she was asleep. With it was a letter from her mother, which had come in the noon mail.

She opened Allison's note first, read it, and put it back into the envelope. Her mother's letter was almost equally brief. That, too, she returned to its envelope without comment.

"How is your mother, Isabel?" inquired Madame, having caught a glimpse of the bold, dashing superscription which was familiar, though infrequent.

"She 's all right," Isabel answered, breaking

Released

open a hot muffin. "It 's funny that it should come at the same time as the other."

"Why?" asked Rose, merely for the sake of making conversation.

"Because just as Mamma writes to tell me that marriage is slavery, but that if he can take care of me and Aunt Francesca approves of him, it will be all right, Allison writes and releases me from the engagement."

"Poor boy!" sighed Madame.

"I don't know why you should say 'poor boy,'" Isabel observed, rather fretfully. "He 's not very ill if he can write letters. I 'm sure I don't feel like writing any."

"I was n't thinking of that," said Madame, half to herself.

"And as for his releasing me," Isabel went on, coolly, "I 'm glad he was decent enough to do it and save me the trouble of releasing myself."

Rose got to her feet somehow, her face deathly white. "Do you mean," she cried, "that you would think for a minute of accepting release?"

"Why, certainly," the girl replied, in astonishment. "Why not? He says himself that he can't ask me to marry a cripple."

Rose winced visibly. "Isabel!" she breathed. "Oh, Isabel!"

"My dear," said Madame, with such kindness as she could muster, "have you for-

gotten that he saved you from death, or worse?"

Nobody Cares!

"He did n't do anything for me but to tell me to jump. I did more for him than that. Nobody seems to think it was anything for me to get up out of the dust, with my best white dress all ruined and my face scratched and my ankle sprained and one arm bleeding, and help the Crosbys carry a heavy man to their machine and lay him on the back seat."

"I thought the Crosbys carried him," put in Madame. "They 're strong enough to do it, I should think."

"Well, I helped. I had to take all that nasty raw meat out of the back seat and throw it out in the ditch to the dogs, and stand up all the way home, bruised as I was, to keep him from falling off the seat. We were in a perfect bedlam there for a while, but it does n't seem to make any difference to anybody. Nobody cares what happens to me."

"Besides," she went on, with her voice raised to a high pitch by excitement, "I don't see why I should be expected to marry a man with only one hand. He can't play any more, and if he can't play, how can he make any money to take care of me, even if I should tie myself to him for life? Do you expect me to take in washing and take care of him?"

"Isabel," said Madame, coldly, "please stop talking so loudly and please listen for a

Madame's Anger

moment. Nobody expects you to marry a man whom, for any reason on earth, you do not love well enough to marry. Kindly consider that as something to be settled in accordance with your own wishes and desires."

"Certainly," interrupted the girl. "I 'd like to see anybody force me to marry him!"

Madame compressed her lips into a thin, tight line, and her face became stern, even hard. She clenched her small hands tightly and her breath came quickly. A red spot burned on either cheek.

Never having seen Madame angry before, Rose was almost frightened. She herself was not angry, but hurt—for him. At the moment she heard of the accident, her love for him had transcended the bounds of self and merged into prayer for him and for his good, whatever that might prove to be.

"Isabel," said Rose, very softly, "will you do one thing for me?"

"What?" Isabel demanded, suspiciously.

"Listen, dear. For me, if not for him, will you go to him, and—well, simply be kind? Don't let him think that this terrible thing has separated him from you or changed your love. Wait until he is strong and well again before you tell him. Will you, please?"

Isabel's flushed face took on the expression of outraged virtue. "I don't know why I should

Only Allison!

be expected to lie," she remarked evasively, with a subtle change of manner.

Madame Bernard cleared her throat. "Your love was a lie," she said, in a tone that neither of them had ever heard her use before. "One more won't matter."

Isabel fidgeted in her chair and nervously tapped the edge of her plate with her fork. "I have n't heard anybody say," she began, with the air of one scoring a fine point, "that his father does n't love him, and yet he has n't gone near him—has n't even seen him since we were hurt. If Colonel Kent can stay away from him, I don't know why I can't."

The argument seemed unanswerable, for neither Madame nor Rose spoke. They sat with averted eyes until the silence became oppressive, and Isabel, with ostentatious difficulty, pushed back her chair and limped painfully out of the room.

When she had locked her own door, she was more at ease, and began to survey her unpleasant situation. Nobody seemed to consider her at all—it was only Allison, and everything and everybody, apparently, must be sacrificed for him. Just because she had promised to marry him, when he had both hands, they wanted her to go on with it, in spite of the fact that he saw it was impossible.

Isabel sighed heavily. Nobody knew how keenly disappointed she was. She had written

Bubbles Burst

to her few friends, told them about her engagement ring, the plans made for her trousseau, the promised touring car, and the brilliant social career that lay before her as the wife of a famous violinist.

She pictured a triumphal tour from city to city, with the leaders of fashion everywhere vying with each other in entertaining them—or, at least, her. It would, of course, be necessary for Allison to play occasionally in the evening and they would miss a great deal on that account, but her days would be free, and she could cancel all her own social obligations by complimentary tickets and suppers after the concerts.

She had planned it all as she took lazy stitches in her dainty lingerie. Aunt Francesca and Rose had been helping her, but the whole thing had stopped suddenly. It seemed rather selfish of them not to go on with it, for lingerie was always useful, and even though she should not marry Allison, it was not at all improbable that she would marry someone else.

If she could find anybody who had plenty of money and would be good to her, she knew that she would encounter no parental opposition, in spite of Mrs. Ross's pronounced views upon the slavery of matrimony.

Allison had been very decent in releasing her from her awkward predicament. He had even arranged it so that no answer was necessary

After the Accident

and she need not even see him again. She had the natural shrinking of the healthy young animal from its own stricken kind. It would be much nicer not to see him again.

But, if he could write letters now, it would not be long before he would be able to come over, though his hand had not yet been taken off. It was too bad, for everything had been very pleasant until the accident. She had missed Allison's daily visits and had probably lost the touring car, though as she had taken pains to find out, it had fallen into the ditch and had been injured very little.

Aunt Francesca and Rose had been queer ever since it happened. After Colonel Kent and the servants and the twins had lifted Allison out of "The Yellow Peril" and carried him up to his own room on an improvised stretcher, while someone else was telephoning for every doctor in the neighbourhood, the twins had taken her home. She had insisted upon their helping her up the steps, and as soon as Aunt Francesca and Rose heard the news, they had paid no attention to her at all, but, with one voice, had demanded that the twins should take them to Kent's immediately.

They had gone without even stopping for their hats, and left her wholly to the servants. Even when they had come home, late at night, in their own carriage, it was over half an hour before Aunt Francesca came to her room, so

Planning to Take Flight

overburdened with selfish grief that she did not even listen to the recital of Isabel's numerous bruises.

Perhaps it would be best to go away, though the city was terrible in Summer, and she had only money enough to take her to the hotel where her mother retained a suite of three rooms. If Aunt Francesca and Rose would leave her alone in the house long enough, and she could pack a suit-case and get the carriage just in time to take her to the train, she could write a formal note and ask to have the rest of her things sent by express. If there were a late train, or one very early in the morning, she could probably manage it, even without the carriage, but, on consulting the time-table, she found that trains did not run at hours suitable for escape.

However, it was just as well to pack while she had time. She could keep the suit-case hidden until the auspicious moment arrived. It would only take a moment to open it and sweep her toilet articles into it from the top of her dresser.

She had just taken a fresh shirtwaist out of the drawer when there was a light, determined rap at the door. When she opened it, she was much astonished to see Aunt Francesca come in, dressed for a drive.

"Are you almost ready, Isabel?" she asked, politely.

"Ready," gasped the girl. "For what?"

Obliged to Go

It seemed for the moment as though she had been anticipated in her departure and was about to be put out of the house.

"To drive over to Kent's," answered Madame, imperturbably. From her manner one would have thought the drive had been long planned.

Isabel sat down on her bed. "I 'm not going," she said.

"Oh, yes, you are," returned Madame, in a small, thin voice. "You may go in your tea gown and slippers if you prefer, but I will wait until you dress, if you are quick about it."

"I won't," Isabel announced, flatly. "I 'm sick. You know I 'm all bruised up and I can't walk."

"You can walk down-stairs and it 's only a few steps farther to the carriage. I telephoned over to ask if he would see you, and the nurse said that he would be very glad to see you—that he had been asking all day why you did not come. The carriage is waiting at the door, so please hurry."

Isabel was head and shoulders taller than the determined little lady who stood there, waiting, but there was something in her manner that demanded immediate obedience. Sullenly, Isabel began to dress. If Aunt Francesca went with her, it would not be necessary to say much. She caught at the thought as

No Retreat Possible

though she were drowning and the proverbial straw had floated into reach.

She took her time about dressing, but Madame said nothing. She simply stood there, waiting, in the open door, until the last knot was tied, the last pin adjusted, and the last stray lock brushed into place.

Isabel limped ostentatiously all the way down-stairs and had to be assisted into the carriage. During the brief drive neither spoke. The silence was unbroken until they reached the door of Allison's room, then Madame said, in a low tone: "The carriage will call for you in an hour. Remember he loves you, and be kind."

Up to that moment, Isabel had not suspected that she would be obliged to see him alone. She was furious with Aunt Francesca for thus betraying her, but no retreat was possible. The nurse smilingly ushered her in, passed her almost on the threshold, and went out, quietly closing the door.

Allison, as eager as a boy of twenty, had half risen in bed. The injured hand was hidden by the sheet, but the other was outstretched in welcome. "Isabel," he breathed. "My Isabel!"

Isabel did not move. "How do you do?" she said, primly.

"I 'm sorry I can't get you a chair, dear. Come close, won't you?"

Disappointing

Isabel limped painfully to the chair that was farthest from him, dragged it over to the bed, and sat down—just out of his reach. Below, the rumble of wheels announced that Madame had gone back home. Unless she walked, Isabel was stranded at Kent's for a full hour.

"My note," Allison was saying. "You got it, did n't you?"

"Yes. It came while I was at luncheon to-day."

It flashed upon him for an instant that the reality was disappointing, that this was not all as he had dreamed it would be, but pride bade him conceal his disappointment as best he could.

"You were hurt," he said, tenderly. "I 'm so sorry."

"Yes. I was hurt quite a good deal."

"But you 're all right now, and I 'm so glad!"

"Thank you," she answered, listlessly.

Her eyes roved about the room, observing every detail of furniture and ornament. It was old-fashioned, and in a way queer, she thought. She was glad that she would never have to live there.

Allison watched her eagerly. Like a wayfarer in the desert thirsting for water, he longed for her tenderness; for one unsought kiss, even in farewell. His pride sustained him no

longer. "Dear," he pleaded, like the veriest beggar; "won't you kiss me just once?"

Isabel hesitated. "It is n't proper," she murmured, "now that we are no longer engaged. I 'm sorry you got hurt," she added, as an afterthought.

Allison's face paled suddenly. So, she accepted her release! Then eager justification of her made him wonder if by any chance she could have misunderstood.

"Dearest," he said, with cold lips, "did you think for a single instant that I wanted to release you? I did it because it was the only thing an honourable man could do and I would n't let pity for me hold you to a promise made in love. It was n't that I did n't want you. I 've wanted you every day and every hour. Only God knows how I 've wanted you and shall want you all the rest of my life, unless——"

He paused, hoping, for the space of a heartbeat, that the dream might come true.

But Isabel did not move from her chair. She surveyed the opposite wall for a few moments before she spoke. "It was honourable," she said, in a more friendly tone. "Of course it was the only thing you could do."

"Of course," he echoed, bitterly.

Isabel rose, went to the foot of the bed, and leaned upon it, facing him. "I 'm afraid I 've stayed too long," she said. "I think

A Souvenir

I 'd better go. I can wait downstairs for the carriage."

Allison did not answer. His eyes burned strangely in his white face, making her vaguely uncomfortable and afraid. She turned the diamond ring upon her finger and slowly slipped it off.

"I suppose I must give this back," she said, reluctantly. "I must n't wear it now."

"Why not?" he asked huskily.

"Because it does n't mean anything—now."

"It never did. Keep it, Isabel."

"Thank you," she said, calmly, putting it back, but on the middle finger. "I must go now. I hope you 'll get along all right."

"Wait just a minute, please." He rang a bell that was on a table within his reach, and the nurse came in. "Please bring me my violin."

Isabel turned to the door but was held back by a peremptory command. "Wait!"

"Here," he cried shrilly, offering Isabel the violin. "Take this, too!"

"What for?" she asked, curiously. "I can't play."

"Nevertheless, it belongs to you. Keep it, as a souvenir!"

Holding the violin awkwardly, Isabel backed out of the room, the nurse following her and closing the door. The nurse was a

A Man Weeps

young woman who had not sacrificed her normal human sympathy to her chosen work, but had managed, happily, to combine the two. She watched Isabel disdainfully as she went down-stairs, very briskly for one with a sprained ankle.

"God!" said Allison, aloud. "Oh, God in Heaven!"

Then the nurse turned away in pity, for behind the closed door she heard a grown man sobbing like a hurt child.

XVII

Penance

Conscience Smitten

THE Crosby twins had gone home very quietly, after doing all they could to help Colonel Kent and Madame Bernard. "The Yellow Peril" chugged along at the lowest speed with all its gaudy banners torn down. Neither spoke until they passed the spot where the red touring car lay on its side in the ditch, and four or five dogs, still hungry and hopeful, wrangled over a few bare bones.

Juliet was sniffing audibly, and, as soon as she saw the wreck, burst into tears. "Oh, Romie," she sobbed, "if he 's dead, we 've killed him !"

Romeo swallowed a lump in his throat, winked hard, and roughly advised Juliet to "shut up."

When the machine was safely in the barn, and all the scattered dogs collected and imprisoned, Romeo came in, ready to talk it over. "We 've got to do something," he said, "but I don't know what it is."

"What Can We Do?"

"Oh, Romie," cried Juliet with a fresh burst of tears, "do you think they'll hang us? We're murderers!"

Romeo considered for a moment before he answered. "We aren't murderers, because we did n't go to do it. They won't hang us—but they ought to," he added, remorsefully.

"What can we do?" mourned Juliet. "Oh, what can we do?"

"Well, we can pay all the bills for one thing—that's a good start. To-morrow, I'll see about getting that car out of the ditch and taking care of it."

"Somebody may steal it," she suggested.

"Not if we guard it. One or both of us ought to sit by it until we can get it into the barn."

Juliet wiped her eyes. "That's right. We'll guard it all night to-night and while we're guarding it, we'll talk it all over and decide what to do."

The dinner of unwholesome delicacies which they had planned as the last feature of the day's celebration was hesitatingly renounced. "We don't deserve to have anything at all to eat," said Juliet. "What is it that they feed prisoners on?"

"Bread and water—black bread?"

"Where could we get black bread?"

"I don't know. I never saw any."

After discussing a penitential menu for some

Sentry Duty

time, they finally decided to live upon mush and milk for the present, and, if Allison should die, forever. "We can warm it in the winter," said Romeo, "and it won't be so bad."

When their frugal repast was finished, they instinctively changed their festal garments for the sober attire of every day. Romeo brought in two lanterns and Juliet pasted red tissue paper around them, so that they might serve as warning signals of the wreck. At sunset, they set forth, each with a blanket and a lantern to do sentry duty by the capsized car.

"Ought n't we to have a dog or two?" queried Romeo, as they trudged down the road. "Watchmen always have dogs."

"We ought n't to have anything that would make it any easier for us to watch, and besides, the dogs were n't to blame. They don't need to sit up with us—let 'em have their sleep."

"All right," Romeo grunted. "Shall we divide the night into watches and one of us sit on the car while the other walks?"

"No, we 'll watch together, and we won't sit on the car—we 'll sit on the cold, damp ground. If we take cold and die it will only serve us right."

"We can't take cold in June," objected Romeo, "with two blankets."

"Unless it rains."

The Night Watch

"It won't rain to-night," he said, gloomily; "look at the stars!"

The sky was clear, and pale stars shone faintly in the afterglow. There was not even a light breeze—the world was as still and calm as though pain and death were unknown.

When they reached the scene of the accident, Romeo set the two red lanterns at the point where the back of the car touched the road. They spread one blanket on the grass at the other side of the road and sat down to begin their long vigil. Romeo planned to go home to breakfast at sunrise and bring Juliet some of the mush and milk left from supper. Then, while she continued to watch the machine, he would go into town and make arrangements for its removal.

"Is there room in our barn for both cars?" she asked.

"No. Ours will have to come out."

Juliet shuddered. "I never want to see it again."

"Neither do I."

"Can we sell it?"

"We ought not to sell it unless we gave him the money. We should n't have it ourselves."

"Then," suggested Juliet, "why don't we give it away and give him just as much as it cost, including our suits and the dogs' collars and everything?"

"We have no right to give away a man-killer. 'The Yellow Peril' is cursed."

"Let's sacrifice it," she cried. "Let's make a funeral pyre in the yard and burn it, and our suits and the dogs' collars and everything. Let's burn everything we've got that we care for!"

"All right," agreed Romeo, uplifted by the zeal of the true martyr. "And," he added, regretfully, "I'll shoot all the dogs and bury 'em in one long trench. I don't want to see anything again that was in it."

"I don't either," returned Juliet. She wondered whether she should permit the wholesale execution of the herd, since it was a thing she had secretly desired for a long time. "You must n't shoot Minerva and the puppies," she continued, as her strict sense of justice asserted itself, "because she was n't in it. She was at home taking care of her children and they'd die if she should be shot now."

So it was settled that Minerva, who had taken no part in the fatal celebration, should be spared, with her innocent babes.

"And in a few years more," said Romeo, hopefully, "we'll have lots more dogs, though probably not as many as we've got now."

Juliet sighed heavily but was in honour bound to make no objections, for long ago, when they arbitrated the dog question, it was written in the covenant that no dogs should be

Sackcloth and Ashes

imported or none killed, except by mutual consent. And Minerva had five puppies, and if each of the five should follow the maternal example, and if each of those should do likewise—Juliet fairly lost her head in a maze of mental arithmetic.

"We ought to go into deep mourning," Romeo was saying.

"I 've been thinking of that. We should repent in sackcloth and ashes, only I don't know what sackcloth is."

"I guess it 's that rough brown stuff they make potato bags of."

"Burlap?"

"Yes. But we have n't many ashes at this time of year and we 'll have still less if we live on mush and milk."

"Maybe we could get ashes somewhere," she said, thoughtfully.

"We 'd have to, because it would take us over a year to get enough to repent in."

"There 'll be ashes left from the automobile and the suits, and if you can get enough potato bags, I 'll fix 'em so we can wear 'em at the sacrifice and afterwards we can buy deep mourning."

"All right, but you must n't make pretty suits."

"I could n't, out of potato bags. They 'll have to be plain—very plain."

"The first thing is to get this car into our

Romeo's Logic

barn, and write and tell Colonel Kent where it is. Then we 'll get our black clothes, and then we 'll shoot the dogs and bury 'em, and then we 'll have the sacrifice, and then——"

"And then," repeated Juliet.

"Then we 'll have to go and tell 'em all what we 've done, and offer to pay all the bills, and give 'em the price of the car besides for damages."

"Oh, Romie," cried Juliet, with a shudder, "we don't have to go and tell 'em, do we? We don't have to take strangers into our consciences, do we?"

"Certainly," replied Romeo, sternly. "Just because we don't want to do it is why we 've got to. We 've got to do hard things when we make a sacrifice. Lots of people think they 're charitable if they give away their old clothes and things they don't want. It is n't charity to give away things you want to get rid of and it is n't a sacrifice to do things you don't mind doing. The harder it is and the more we don't want to do it, the better sacrifice."

His logic was convincing, but Juliet drooped visibly. The bent little figure on the blanket was pathetic, but the twins were not given to self-pity. As time went on, the conversation lagged. They had both had a hard day, from more than one standpoint, and it was not surprising that by midnight, the self-appointed sentries were sound asleep upon one blanket,

The Sentries Awake

with Romeo's coat for a pillow and the other blanket tucked around them.

The red lanterns burned faithfully until almost dawn, then smoked and went out, leaving an unpleasant odour that lasted until sunrise. The rumble of a distant cart woke them, and they sat up, shamefacedly rubbing their eyes.

"Oh," cried Juliet, conscience-stricken, "we went to sleep! We went to sleep on duty! How could we?"

"Dunno," returned Romeo, with a frank yawn. "Guess we were tired. Anyhow, the machine is all right."

When the milkman came in sight, they hailed him and purchased a quart of milk. He was scarcely surprised to see them, for the Crosbys were widely known to be eccentric, and presently he drove on. His query about the wrecked car had passed unnoticed.

"If you 'll stay here, Jule," said Romeo, wiping his mouth, "I 'll go and get a team and some rope and we 'll get the car in."

"Can't I go too?"

"No, you stay here. It's bad enough to sleep at your post without deserting it."

"You slept, too," retorted Juliet, quickly on the defensive, "and I 'm a girl."

"Huh!" he sneered. The claim of feminine privilege invariably disgusted him beyond words.

"Suppose people come by—" Juliet faltered; "and—ask—questions."

"Answer 'em," advised Romeo, briefly. "Tell 'em we 've killed a man and are going to suffer for it. We deserve to have everybody know it."

But, fortunately for Juliet's quicker sensibilities, no one passed by in the hour Romeo was gone. He came from the nearest farm with an adequate number of assistants and such primitive machinery as was at hand. The car was not badly damaged and was finally towed into the Crosbys' barn. Then they went into the house and composed a letter to Colonel Kent, but put off copying and sending it until they should be able to get black bordered stationery.

Two weeks later, clad in deepest mourning, the twins trudged into town. At Colonel Kent's there was no one in authority to receive them and their errand was of too much importance to be communicated to either physician or nurse. Their own unopened letter lay on the library table, with many others.

Subdued and chastened in demeanour, they went to Madame Bernard's and waited in funereal silence until Madame came down.

"How do you—" she began, then stopped. "Why, what is the matter?"

"We ran over him," explained Romeo, suggestively inclining his head in the general

"We Did It"

direction of Kent's. "Don't you remember?"

"And if he dies, we 've killed him," put in Juliet, sadly.

"We 'll be murderers if he dies," Romeo continued, "and we ought to be hung."

In spite of her own depression and deep anxiety, Madame saw how keenly the tragedy had affected the twins. "Why, my dears!" she cried. "Do you think for a minute that anybody in the world blames you?"

"We ought to be blamed," Romeo returned, "because we did it."

"But not on purpose—you could n't help it."

"We could have helped it," said Juliet, "by not celebrating. We had no business to buy an automobile, or, even if we had, we should n't have gone out in it until we learned to run it."

"That 's like staying away from the water until you have learned to swim," answered Madame, comfortingly, "and Allison is n't going to die."

"Really? Do you mean it? Are you sure? How do you know?" The words came all at once, in a jumble of eager questions.

"Because he is n't. The worst that could possibly happen to him would be the loss of his left hand, and his father is looking all over the country for some surgeon who can save it."

Sacrifices

"I 'd rather die than to have my hand cut off," said Juliet, in a small, thin voice.

"So would I," added Romeo.

"We 're all hoping for the best," Madame went on, "and you must hope, too. Nobody has thought of blaming you, so you must n't feel so badly about it. Even Allison himself would n't want you to feel badly."

"But we do," Romeo answered, "in spite of all the sacrifices and everything."

"Sacrifices," repeated Madame, wonderingly, "why, what do you mean?"

"We did sentry duty all night by his car," Romeo explained, "and we 're taking care of it in our barn."

"And we 've lived on mush and milk ever since," Juliet added.

"I shot all the dogs but the one with the puppies," said Romeo.

"She was n't in it, you know," Juliet continued. "I helped dig the trench and we buried the whole nineteen end to end by the fence, with their new collars on."

"Then we burned the automobile," resumed Romeo. "We soaked it in kerosene, and put our suits into the back seat—our caps and goggles and everything. We took out all the pieces of iron and steel and gave 'em to the junk man, and then we repented in sackcloth and ashes."

"How so?" queried Madame, with a

Repentance

faint glimmer of amusement in her sad eyes.

"Juliet made suits out of potato sacks—very plain suits—and we put 'em on to repent in."

"We went and stood in the ashes," put in Juliet, "while they were so hot that they hurt our feet, and Romie raised his right hand and said 'I repent' and then I did the same."

"And after the ashes got cold, we sat down in 'em and rubbed 'em into the sackcloth and our hair and all over our faces and hands."

"All the time saying 'I repent! I repent!'" continued Juliet, soberly.

"And then we went into mourning," concluded Romeo.

Madame's heart throbbed with tender pity for the stricken twins, but she wisely said nothing.

"Can you think of anything more we could do, or any more sacrifices we could make?" inquired Juliet, ready to atone in full measure.

"Indeed I can't," Madame replied, truthfully. "I think you 've done everything that could be expected of you."

"We wrote to the Colonel," said Romeo, "but he has n't got it yet. We saw it on the library table. We want to pay all the bills."

"And give Allison as much money as we spent on the automobile and for the suits and

Eased in Mind

everything, and pay for fixing up his car," interrupted Juliet.

"We want to do everything," Romeo said, with marked emphasis.

"Everything," echoed Juliet.

"That 's very nice of you," answered Madame, kindly, "and we all appreciate it."

The stern young faces of the twins relaxed ever so little. It was a great relief to discover that they were not objects of scorn and loathing, for they had brooded over the accident until they had become morbid.

"Did you say that you had been living upon mush and milk ever since?" asked Madame.

"Ever since," they answered, together.

"I 'm sure that 's long enough," she said. "I would n't do it any longer. Won't you stay to dinner with us?"

With one accord the twins rose, impelled by a single impulse toward departure.

"We could n't," said Romeo.

"We must n't," explained Juliet. Then, with belated courtesy, she added: "Thank you, just the same."

They made their adieux awkwardly and went home, greatly eased in mind. As they trudged along the dusty road, they occasionally sighed in relief, but said little until they reached their ancestral abode, dogless now save for the pups gambolling about the door-

Penance Renewed

step and Minerva watching them with maternal pride.

"She said we 'd lived on mush and milk long enough," said Romeo, pensively.

"We might fry the mush," Juliet suggested.

"And have butter and maple syrup on it?"

"Maybe."

"And drink the milk, and have bread, too?"

"I guess so."

"And jam?"

"Not while we 're in mourning," said Juliet, firmly. "We can have syrup on our bread."

"That 's just as good."

"If you think so, you ought not to have it."

"We 've got to feed ourselves, or we 'll die," he objected vigorously, "and if we 're dead, we won't be any good to him or to anybody else, and we can't ever repent any more."

"I 'm not so sure about that," said Juliet, with sinister emphasis.

"Nothing will happen to us that we don't deserve," Romeo assured her, "so come on and let 's have jam. If it makes us sick, it 's wrong, and if it does n't, it 's all right."

The following day, they voluntarily returned to their mush and milk, for they had eaten too much jam, and, having been very ill in the night, considered it sufficient evidence that their penance was not yet over.

XVIII

"Less than the Dust"

No Change

THE heat of August shimmered over the land, and still, to every inquiry at the door or telephone, the quiet young woman in blue and white said: "No change." Allison was listless and apathetic, yet comparatively free from pain.

Life, for him, had ebbed back to the point where the tide must either cease or turn. He knew neither hunger nor thirst nor weariness; only the great pause of soul and body, the sense of the ultimate goal.

One by one, he meditated upon the things he used to care for. Isabel came first, but her youth and beauty had ceased to trouble or to beckon. His father had gone on ahead. The delusion still persisted, but he spoke of it no more. Even the violin did not matter now. He remembered the endless hours he had spent at work, almost every day of his life for years, and to what end? In an instant, it had been rendered empty, purposeless, and vain—like life itself.

A Cunning Scheme

Occasionally a new man came to look at his hand; not from the city now, but from towns farther inland. The examinations were painful, of course, but he made no objections. After the man had gone, he could count the slow, distinct pulsations that marked the ebbing of the pain, but never troubled himself to ask either the doctor or the nurse what the new man had said about it. He no longer cared.

Aunt Francesca had not come—nor Rose. Perhaps they were dead, also. He asked the nurse one sultry afternoon if they were dead.

"No," she assured him; "nobody is dead."

He wondered, fretfully, why she should take the trouble to lie to him so persistently upon this one point. Then a cunning scheme came into his mind. It presented itself mechanically to him as a trap for the nurse. If they were dead, she could not produce them instantly alive, as a conjurer takes animals from an apparently empty box. If he demanded that she should bring them to him, or even one, it would prove his point and let her see that he knew how she was trying to deceive him.

"Have they gone away?" he inquired.

"No, they 're still there."

"Then," said Allison, with the air of one scoring a fine point, "will you ask—well—ask Miss Bernard to come over and see me?"

Remembering the other woman who had come in response to his request, and the disas-

trous effect the visit had had upon her patient she hesitated. "I 'm afraid you 're not strong enough," she said kindly. "Can't you wait a little longer?"

"There," he cried. "I knew they were dead!"

As she happened to be both wise and kind, the young woman hesitated no longer. "If I brought you a note from her you would believe me, would n't you?"

"No," he replied, stubbornly.

"Is n't there any way you would know, without seeing her?"

He considered for a few moments. "I 'd know if I heard her play," he said at length. "There 's no one who could play just the way she does."

"Suppose I ask her to come over sometimes and play the piano downstairs for a few minutes at a time, very softly. Would you like that?"

"Yes—that is, I don't mind." He was sure, now, that his trap was in working order, for no one could deceive him at the piano—he would recognise Rose at the first chord.

"Excuse me just a minute, please." She returned presently with the news that Rose would come as soon as she could. "Can't you go to sleep now?" she suggested.

Allison smiled ironically. How transparent she was!

Soft Music

She wanted him to go to sleep and when he awoke, she would tell him that Rose had been there, and had played, and had just gone.

"No," he answered, "I don't want to go to sleep. I want to hear Rose play."

So he waited, persistently wide awake. Sharpened by illness and pain, his hearing was phenomenally acute; so much so that even a whisper in the next room was distinctly audible. He heard the distant rumble of wheels, approaching steadily, and wondered why the house did not tremble when the carriage stopped. He heard the lower door open softly, then close, a quick, light step in the living room, the old-fashioned piano stool whirling on its rusty axis, then a few slow, deep chords prefacing a familiar bit of Chopin.

He turned to the nurse, who sat in her low rocking-chair at the window. "I beg your pardon. I thought you were not telling me the truth."

The young woman only smiled in answer. "Listen!"

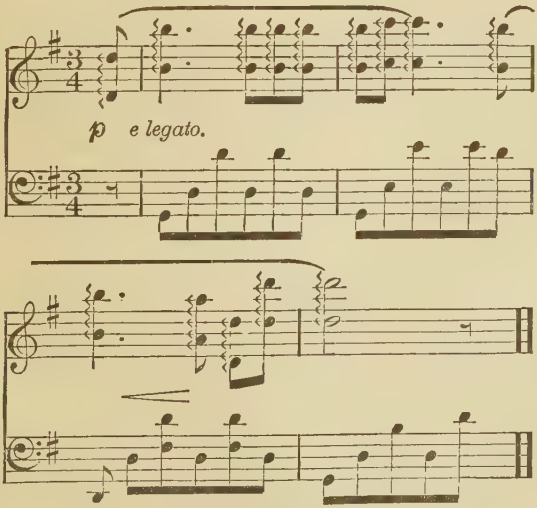
From downstairs the music came softly. Rose was playing with the exquisite taste and feeling that characterised everything she did. She purposely avoided the extremes of despair and joy, keeping to the safe middle-ground. Living waters murmured through the melody, the sea surged and crooned, flying clouds went through blue, sunny spaces,

Life more Abundant

and birds sang, ever with an unfailing uplift, as of many wings.

Allison's calmness insensibly changed, not in degree, but in quality, as the piano magically brought before him green distances lying fair beneath the warm sun, clover-scented meadows and blossoming boughs. "Life," he said to himself; "life more abundant."

She drifted from one thing to another, playing snatches of old songs, woven together by modulations of her own making. At last she paused to think of something else, but her fingers remembered, and began, almost of their own accord:

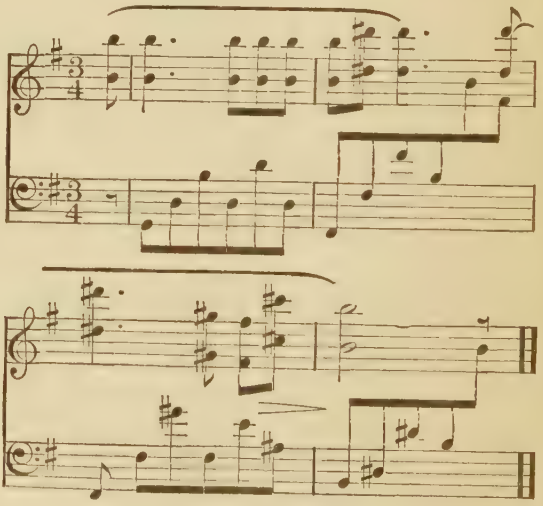


Allison stirred restlessly, as he recalled how

The Pale Star

he had heard it before. He saw the drifted petals of fallen roses, the moon-shadow on the dial, hours wrong, the spangled cobwebs in the grass and the other spangles, changed to faint iridescence in the enchanted light as Isabel came toward him and into his open arms. Could marble respond to a lover's passion, could dead lips answer with love for love, then Isabel might have yielded to him at least a tolerant tenderness. He saw her now, alien and apart, like some pale star that shone upon a barren waste, but never for him.

Another phrase, full of love and longing, floated up the stairway and entered his room, a guest unbidden.



He turned to the nurse. "Ask Miss Bernard to come up for a few minutes, will you?"

"Do you think it 's wise?" she temporised.

"Please ask her to come up," he said, imperatively. "Must I call her myself?"

So Rose came up, after receiving the customary caution not to stay too long and avoid everything that might be unpleasant or exciting.

She stood for a moment in the doorway, hesitating. Her face was almost as white as her linen gown, but her eyes were shining with strange fires.

"White Rose," he said, wearily, "I have been through hell."

"I know," she answered, softly, drawing up a chair beside him. "Aunt Francesca and I have wished that we might divide it with you and help you bear it."

He stretched a trembling hand toward her and she took it in both her own. They were soft and cool, and soothing.

"Thank you for wanting to share it," he said. "Thank you for coming, for playing—for everything."

"Either of us would have come whenever you wanted us, night or day."

"Suppose it was night, and I 'd wanted you to come and play to me. Would you have come?"

"Why, yes. Of course I would!"

What a Difference!

"I did n't know," he stammered, "that there was so much kindness in the world. I have been very lonely since——"

Her eyes filled and she held his hand more closely. "You won't be lonely any more. I 'll come whenever you want me, night or day, to play, to read—or anything. Only speak, and I 'll come."

"How good you are!" he murmured, gratefully. "No, please don't let go of my hand." In some inexplicable fashion strength seemed to flow to him from her.

"I think you 'll be glad to know," she said, "how sympathetic everybody has been. Strangers stop us on the street to ask for you, and people telephone every day. Down in the library, there 's a pile of letters that would take days to read, and many of them have foreign stamps. It makes one feel warm around the heart, for it brings the ideal of human brotherhood so near."

He sighed and his face looked haggard. The brotherhood of man was among the things that did not concern him now. The weariness of the ages was in every line of his body.

"I have been thinking," he went on, after a little, "what a difference one little hour can make, a minute, even. Once I had everything —youth, health, strength, a happy home, love, a dear father, and every promise of success in my chosen career. Now I 'm old and

broken; health, strength, and love have been taken away in an instant, my father is gone, and my career is only an empty memory. I have no violin, and, if I had, what use would it be to me without—why Rose, I have n't even fingers to make the notes nor hands to hold it."

"Take Mine!"

Rose could bear no more. She sprang to her feet with arms outstretched, all her love and longing swelling into infinite appeal. "Oh Boy!" she cried, "take mine! Take my hands, for always!"

For a tense instant they faced each other. Her breast rose and fell with every quick breath; her eyes met his, then faltered, and the crimson of shame mantled her white face.

"Oh," she breathed, painfully, and turned away from him. When she was half way to the door, he called to her. "Rose! Dear Rose!"

She hesitated, her hand upon the knob. "Close the door and come back," he pleaded. "Please—oh, please!"

Trembling from head to foot, she obeyed him, but her face was pitiful. She could not force herself to look at him. "Forgive," she murmured, "and forget."

The hand he took in his was cold, but her nearness gave him comfort, as never before. His heart was unspeakably tender toward her.

"Rose," he went on, softly, "I 've been too near the other world not to have the truth

Confessions

now. Tell me what you mean! Make me understand!"

She did not answer, nor even lift her eyes. She breathed hard, as though she were in pain.

"Rose," he said again, tightening his clasp upon the hand she tried to draw away, "did you mean that you would be my——"

"In name," she interrupted, throwing up her head proudly. "Just to help you—that was all."

He drew her hand to his hot lips and kissed it twice. "Oh, how divinely kind you are," he whispered, "even to think of stooping to such as I!"

"Have pity," she said brokenly, "and let me go."

"Pity?" he repeated. "In all the world there is none like yours. To think of your being willing to sacrifice yourself, through pity of me!"

The blood came back into her heart by leaps and bounds. She had not utterly betrayed herself, then, since he translated it thus.

"Listen," he was saying. "I cared —terribly, but it's gone, and my heart is empty. It 's like an open grave, waiting for something that does not come. Did you ever care?"

"Yes," she answered, with eyes downcast.

"Did you care for someone who did not care for you?"

"Yes," she replied, again.

"And he never knew?"

"No." The word was almost a whisper.

"He must have been a brute, not to have cared. Was it long ago?"

"Not very."

"Have I ever met him?"

The suggestion of an ironical smile hovered for a moment around her pale lips, then vanished. "No."

"I have no right to—to ask his name."

"No. What difference does a name make?"

"None. Could you never bring yourself to care for anyone else?"

"No," she breathed. "Oh, no!"

"And yet, with your heart as empty as mine you still have pity enough to——"

"To serve you," she answered. Her eyes met his clearly now. "To help you—as your best friend might."

"Rose, dear Rose! You give me new courage, but how can I let you sacrifice yourself for me?"

"Believe me," she said diffidently, "there is no question of sacrifice. Have you never thought of what you might do, that would be even better than the career you had planned?"

"Why, no. What could I do, without——"

"Write," she said, with her eyes shining. "Let others play what you write. Immortality comes by way of the printed page."

"I could n't," he returned, doubtfully.

The Old Comradeship

"I never composed anything except two or three little things that I never dared to play, even for encores."

"Never say you can't. Say 'I must,' and 'I will.'"

"You 're saying them for me. You almost make me believe in myself."

"That 's the very best of beginnings, is n't it?"

She was quite calm now, outwardly, and she drew her hand away. Allison remembered the long, happy hours they had spent together before Isabel came into his life. Now that she was gone, the old comradeship had returned, the sweeter because of long absence. Rose had never fretted nor annoyed him; she seemed always to understand.

"You don't know how glad I 'd be," he sighed, "to feel that I was n't quite out of it—that there was something in life for me still. I did n't want to be a bit of driftwood on the current of things."

"You 're not going to be—I won't let you. Have n't you learned that sometimes we have to wait; that we can't always be going on? Just moor your soul at the landing place, and when the hour comes, you 'll swing out into the current again. Much of the driftwood is only craft that broke away from the landing."

He smiled, for her fancy pleased him. An abiding sense of companionship crept into his

loneliness; his isolation seemed to be shared. "And you 'll stay at the landing with me," he whispered, "until the time comes to set sail again?"

"Yes."

"And—after the worst that can come—is over, we 'll make it right with the world and go abroad together?"

"Yes." Her voice was very low now.

"And we 'll be the best of friends, for always?"

"Yes—the best of friends in all the world."

"And you 'll promise me that, if you 're ever sorry, you 'll come straight and tell me—that you 'll ask me to set you free?"

"I promise."

"Then everything is all right between you and me?"

"Yes, but I 'm ashamed—bitterly ashamed."

"You must n't be, for I 'm very glad. We 'll try to forget the wreckage together. I could n't have asked, unless I had known about—the other man, and you would n't have told me, I know. It would n't have been like you to tell me."

There was a knock, the door opened, and the nurse came in, watch in hand. "I 'm sorry, Miss Bernard, but you can come to-morrow if he 's well enough."

"I 'll be well enough," said Allison, smiling.

"Of course," Rose assured him, shaking

Natural Sleep

hands in friendly fashion. "Don't forget that it 's a secret."

"I won't. Good-bye, Rose."

When she had gone, the nurse studied him furtively, from across the room. He had changed in some subtle way—he seemed stronger than before. Unless it was excitement, to be followed by a reaction, Miss Bernard had done him good. The night would prove it definitely, one way or the other.

Allison slept soundly until daybreak, for the first time—not stupor, but natural sleep. The nurse began to wonder if it was possible that a hand so badly crushed and broken could be healed. Hitherto her service had been mechanically kind; she had taken no interest because she saw no hope. How wonderful it would be if that long procession of learned counsellors should be mistaken, after all!

Rose walked home, disdaining the waiting carriage. She had forgotten her hat and the sunset lent radiance to a face that needed no more. By rare tact and kindness, Allison had removed the sting from her shame and the burden she had borne so long was lifted from her heavy heart.

She was happier now than she had ever been before in her life, but she must hide her joy from the others as she had previously hidden her pain—or tried to. She knew that Isabel

would not see, but Aunt Francesca's eyes were keen and she could not tell even her just now.

How strange it would be to wake in the night, without that dull, dead pain! How strange it was to feel herself needed, and oh, the joy of serving him!

She thrilled with the ecstasy of sacrifice; with that maternal compassion which is a vital element in woman's love for man. Sublimated beyond passion and self-seeking, and asking only the right to give, she poured out the treasure of her soul at his feet, though her pride demanded that he must never know.

When she went into the house, light seemed to enter the shaded room with her. No one was there, but the open piano waited, ready to receive a confidence. With a laugh that was half a sob of joy, she sat down, her fingers readily finding the one thing that suited her mood.

The wild, half-savage music rang through the house in full, deep chords, but only Rose knew the words, which, in her mind, fitted themselves to the melody as though she dared to sing them:

"Less than the dust, beneath thy Chariot wheel,
Less than the rust, that never stained thy Sword,
Less than the trust thou hast in me, O Lord,
Even less then these.

"Less than the weed that grows beside thy door,
Less than the speed of hours spent far from thee,
Less than the need thou hast in life of me;
Even less am I."

Gladness

Upstairs, Isabel yawned lazily, and wondered why Rose should play so loud, but Aunt Francesca smiled to herself, for she knew that Allison was better and that Rose was glad.

XIX

Over the Bar

AS a flower may bloom in a night, joy returned to Madame Bernard's house after long absence. There was no outward sign, for Rose was still quiet and self-controlled, but her face was a shade less pale and there was a tremulous music in her voice.

Isabel had ceased to limp, but still dwelt upon the shock and its lingering effects. She amused herself in her own way, reading paper-covered novels, feasting upon chocolates, teasing Mr. Boffin, and playing solitaire. Madame remarked to Rose that Isabel seemed to have a cosmic sense of time.

The guest never came down-stairs till luncheon was announced, and did not trouble herself to make an elaborate, or even appropriate toilet. Madame began to wonder how long Isabel intended to remain and to see the wisdom of the modern fashion of appointing the hour of departure in the invitation.

Yet, as she said to herself rather grimly, she

would have invited Isabel to remain through the Summer, and perhaps, in the early Autumn she might return to town of her own accord. Moreover, there appeared to be no graceful way of requesting an invited guest to leave.

Though Madame was annoyed by the mere fact of Isabel's presence, she had ceased to distress Rose, who dwelt now in a world apart from the others. She spent her afternoons at the other house, playing softly downstairs, reading to Allison, or talking to him of the brilliant future that she insisted was to be his.

Neither of them spoke of the hour in which Rose had unwittingly revealed herself, nor did they seem to avoid the subject. Allison had taken her for granted, on a high plane of pure friendliness, and not for an instant did he translate her overpowering impulse as anything but womanly pity.

She practised for an hour or two every morning that she might play better in the afternoon, she ransacked the library for interesting and cheerful things to read to him, and she even found a game or two that he seemed to enjoy. From Madame Francesca's spotless kitchen came many a dainty dish to tempt his capricious appetite, and all the flowers from both gardens, daily, made a bower of his room.

Constantly, too, Rose brought the message of hopefulness and good cheer. From her abounding life and superb vitality he drew

Hidden Forces

unconscious strength; the hidden forces that defy analysis once more exerted themselves in his behalf. So far as man is of the earth, earthy, by the earth and its fruits may he be healed, but the heavenly part of him may be ministered unto only by the angels of God.

His old fear of the darkness had gone and the night light had been taken out into the hall. In the faint glow, he could see the objects in his room distinctly, during the brief intervals of wakefulness. A flower dropped from its vase, a book lying half open, a crumpled handkerchief upon his chiffonier, the pervading scent of attar of roses and dried petals—all these brought him a strange sense of nearness to Rose, as a perfume may be distilled from a memory.

Day by day, Isabel became more remote. He thought of her without emotion when he thought of her at all, for only women may know the agony of love enduring after the foundation upon which it was built has been swept away.

The strange men from distant places came less frequently. Days would pass, and bring no word. The country doctor who had first been called stopped occasionally when time permitted, and his faithful old horse needed a little rest, but he only shook his head. He admitted to the nurse that he was greatly sur-

The New Comer

prised because the inevitable operation had not yet become imperative.

Colonel Kent seemed to have been lost for almost a week. During that time no word had been received from him and Madame's daily bulletin: "No change for the worse," had been returned, marked "not found." She was vaguely troubled and uneasy, fearing that something might have happened to him, but forebore to speak of her fears.

One morning, while Allison was still asleep, the nurse wakened him gently. "A new man, Mr. Allison; can you see him now?"

"I don't care," he replied. "Bring him in."

The newcomer was a young man—one would have guessed that the ink was scarcely dry on his diploma. He had a determined mouth, a square chin, kind eyes, and the buoyant youthful courage that, by itself, carries one far upon any chosen path.

He smiled at Allison and Allison smiled back at him, in friendly fashion. "Now," said the young man, "let 's see."

His big fingers were astonishingly gentle, they worked with marvellous dexterity, and, for the first time, the dreaded examination was almost painless. He asked innumerable questions both of Allison and the nurse, and wanted to know who had been there previously.

The nurse had kept no record, but she knew

A Formidable Array

some of the men, and mentioned their names—names to conjure with in the professional world. Even the two great Germans had said it was of no use.

The young man wrinkled his brows in deep thought. "What have you been using?" he inquired, of the nurse.

"Everything. Come here."

She led him into the next room, where a formidable array of bottles and boxes almost covered a large table. He looked them all over, carefully, scrutinising the names on the druggist's labels, sniffing here and there, occasionally holding some one bottle to the light, and finally, out of sheer youthful curiosity, counting them.

Then he laughed—a cheery, hearty laugh that woke long-sleeping echoes in the old house and made Allison smile, in the next room. "It seems," he commented, "that a doctor has to leave a prescription as other men leave cards—just as a polite reminder of the call."

"What shall I do with them?"

"Dump 'em all out—I don't care. Or, wait a minute; there 's no rush."

He went back to Allison. "I see you 've got quite a drug store here. Are you particularly attached to any special concoction?"

"Indeed I 'm not. Most of 'em have hurt—sinfully."

"I don't know that anything has to be pain-

ful or disagreeable in order to be healing," remarked the young man, thoughtfully. "Would you like to throw 'em all out of the window?"

"I certainly would."

"All right—that 'll be good business." He swung Allison's bed around so that his right arm rested easily on the window sill, requested the nurse to wheel the drug store within easy reach, and rapidly uncorked bottle after bottle with his own hands.

"Now then, get busy."

He sat by, smiling, while Allison poured the varying contents of the drug store on the ground below and listened for the sound of breaking glass when the bottle swiftly followed the last gurgling drop. When all had been disposed of, the nurse took out the table, and the young man smiled expansively at Allison.

"Feel better?"

"I—think so."

"Good. Now, look here. How much does your hand mean to you?"

"How much does it mean?" repeated Allison, pitifully. "It means life, career—everything."

"Enough to make a fight for it then, I take it."

Dull colour surged by waves into Allison's white face. "What do you mean?" he asked, in a broken voice. "Tell me what you mean!"

But the young man was removing his coat. "Hot day," he was saying, "and the young lady won't mind my negligee as long as the braces don't show. Strange—how women hate nice new braces. Say," he said to the nurse as she returned, "get somebody to go up to the station and bring down my trunk, will you?"

"Trunk?" echoed Allison.

"Sure," smiled the young man. "My instructions were to stay if I saw any hope, so I brought along my trunk. I 'm always looking for a chance to hope, and I 've discovered that it 's one of the very best ways to find it."

The nurse had hastened away upon her errand. The new element in the atmosphere of the sick room had subtly affected her, also.

"Don't fence," Allison was saying, huskily. "I 've asked so much that I 've quit asking."

The young man nodded complete understanding. "I know. The moss-backs sit around and look wise, and expect to work miracles on a patient who does n't know what they 're doing and finally gets the impression that he is n't considered fit to know. Far be it from me to disparage the pioneers of our noble profession, but I 'm modest enough to admit that I need help, and the best help, every time, comes from the patient himself."

He drew up his chair beside the bed and sat

"You Give Me Hope"

down. Allison's eager eyes did not swerve from his face.

"Mind you," he went on, "I don't promise anything—I can't, conscientiously. In getting a carriage out of the mud, more depends upon the horse than on the driver. Nature will have to do the work—I can't. All I can do is to guide her gently. If she 's pushed, she gets balky. Maybe there 's something ahead of her that I don't see, and there 's no use spurring her ahead when she 's got to stop and get her breath before she can go up hill.

"That hand can't heal itself without good blood to draw upon, and good material to make bone and nerve of, so we 'll begin to stoke up, gradually, and meanwhile, I 'll camp right here and see what 's doing. And if you can bring yourself to sort of—well, sing at your work, you know, it 's going to make the job a lot easier."

Allison drew a long breath of relief. "You give me hope," he said.

"Sure," returned the young man, with an infectious laugh. "A young surgeon never has much else when he starts, nor for some time to come. Want to sit up?"

"Why," Allison breathed, in astonishment, "I can't."

"Who said so?"

"Everybody. They all said I must lie perfectly still."

Forward March!

"Of course," mused the young man, aloud, "blood may move around all right of itself, and then again, it may not. Would n't do any harm to stir it up a bit and remind the red corpuscles not to loaf on the job."

The nurse came back, to say that the trunk would be up immediately.

"Good. Can I have a bunk in the next room?" Without waiting for her answer, he requested raw eggs and milk, beaten up with a little cream and sherry.

While Allison was drinking it, he moved a big easy chair up near the window, opened every shutter wide, and let the hot sun stream into the room. He expeditiously made a sling for the injured hand, slipped it painlessly into place, put a strong arm under Allison's shoulders, and lifted him to a sitting posture on the edge of the bed. "Now then, forward, march! Just lean on me."

Muscles long unused trembled under the strain but finally he made the harbour of the easy chair, gasping for breath. "Good," said the young man. "At this rate, we 'll soon have clothes on us and be outdoors."

"Really?" asked Allison, scarcely daring to believe his ears.

"Sure," replied the marvellous young man, confidently. "What 's the use of keeping a whole body in the house on account of one hand? I 'm going to tell you just one thing

More Good Business

more, then we 'll quit talking shop and proceed to politics or anything else you like.

"I knew a man once who was a trapeze performer in a circus and he was training his son in the same lofty profession. The boy insisted that he could n't do it, and finally the man said to him: 'Look here, kid, if you 'll put your heart over the bar, your body will follow all right,' and sure enough it did. Now you get your heart over the bar, and trust your hand to follow. Get the idea?"

The sound of the piano below chimed in with the answer. A rippling, laughing melody danced up the stairs and into the room. The young man listened a moment, then asked, "Who?"

"A friend of mine — my very dearest friend."

"More good business. I think I 'll go down and talk to her. What 's her name?"

"Rose."

"What 's the rest of it? I can't start in that way, you know. Bad form."

"Bernard—Rose Bernard."

As quickly and silently as he did everything else, the young man went down-stairs, and the piano stopped, but only for a moment, as he requested her, with an airy wave of the hand, not to mind him. When she finished the old song she was playing, he called her by name, introduced himself, and invited her out into

the garden, because, as he said, "walls not only have ears, but telephones."

"Say," he began, by way of graceful preliminary, "you look to me as though you had sense."

"Thank you," she replied, demurely.

"Sense," he resumed, is lamentably scarce, especially the variety misnamed common—or even horse. I 'm no mental healer, nor anything of that sort, you know, but it 's reasonable to suppose that if the mind can control the body, after a fashion, when the body is well, it 's entitled to some show when the body is n't well, don't you think so?"

Rose assented, though she did not quite grasp what he said. His all pervading breeziness affected her much as it had Allison.

"Now," he continued, "I 'm not unprofessional enough to knock anybody, but I gather that there 's been a procession of undertakers down here making that poor chap upstairs think there 's no chance. I 'm not saying that there is, but there 's no reason why we should n't trot along until we have to stop. It is n't necessary to amputate just yet, and until it is necessary, there 's nothing to hinder us from working like the devil to save him from it, is there?"

"Surely not."

"All right. Are you in on it?"

"I 'm 'in,'" replied Rose, slowly, "on

"On with the Dance"

anything and everything that human power can do, day or night, until we come to the last ditch."

"Good for you. I 'll appoint you first lieutenant. I guess that nurse is all right, though she does n't seem to be unduly optimistic."

"She 's had nothing to make her so. Everything has been discouraging so far."

"Plenty of discouragement in the world," he observed, "handed out free of charge, without paying people to bring it into the house when you 're peevish."

"Very true," she answered, then her eyes filled. "Oh," she breathed, with white lips, "if you can—if you only can——"

"We 'll have a try for it," he said, then continued, kindly: "no salt water upstairs, you know."

"I know," she sighed, wiping her eyes.

"Then 'on with the dance—let joy be unconfined.' "

Rose obediently went back to the piano. The arrival of the trunk and the composition of a hopeful telegram to Colonel Kent occupied the resourceful visitor for ten or fifteen minutes. Then he went back to his patient, who had already begun to miss him.

"You forgot to tell me your name," Allison suggested.

"Sure enough. Call me Jack, or Doctor

Jack, when I 'm not here and have to be called."

"But, as you said yourself a few minutes ago, I can't begin that way. What 's the rest of it?"

"If you 'll listen," responded the young man, solemnly, "I will unfold before your eyes the one blot upon the 'scutcheon of my promising career. My full name is Jonathan Ebenezer Middlekauffer."

"What—how—I mean—excuse me," stammered Allison.

The young man laughed joyously. "You can search me," he answered, with a shrug. "The gods must have been in a sardonic mood about the time I arrived to gladden this sorrowful sphere. I 've never used more of it than I could help, and everybody called me 'Jem' until I went to college, the initials making a shorter and more agreeable name. But before I 'd been there a week, I was 'Jemima' or 'Aunt Jemima' to the whole class. So I changed it myself, though it took a thrashing to make two or three of 'em remember that my name was Jack."

"How did you happen to come here?" queried Allison, without much interest.

"The man who was down here on the fifth sent me. He told me about you and suggested that my existence might be less wearing if I had something to do. He just passed along his

instructions and faded gracefully out of sight, saying: 'You 'd better go, Middlekauffer, as your business seems to be the impossible,' so I packed up and took the first train."

"What did he mean by saying that your business was impossible?"

"Not impossible, but *the* impossible. Good Heavens, man, don't things get mixed like that! All he meant was that such small reputation as I have been able to acquire was earned by doing jobs that the other fellows shirked. I 'm ambidextrous," he added, modestly, "and I guess that helps some. Let 's play piquet."

When Rose came up, an hour or so later, they were absorbed in their game, and did not see her until she spoke. She was overjoyed to see Allison sitting up, but, observing that she was not especially needed, invented a plausible errand and said good-bye, promising to come the next day.

"Nice girl," remarked Doctor Jack, shuffling the cards for Allison. "Mighty nice girl."

"My future wife," answered Allison, proudly, forgetting his promise.

"More good business. You 'd be a brute if you did n't save that hand for her. She 's entitled to the best that you can give her."

"And she shall have it," returned Allison.

Doctor Jack's quick ears noted a new determination in the voice, that only a few hours

What Fun It Would Be!

before had been weak and wavering, and he nodded his satisfaction across the card table.

That night, while Allison slept soundly, and the nurse also, having been told that she was off duty until called, the young man recklessly burned gas in the next room, with pencil and paper before him. First, he carefully considered the man with whom he had to deal, then mapped out a line of treatment, complete to the last detail.

"There," he said to himself, "by that we stand or fall."

The clocks struck three, but the young man still sat there, oblivious to his surroundings, or to the fact that even strong and healthy people occasionally need a little sleep. At last a smile lighted up his face. "What fun it would be," he thought, "for him to give a special concert, and invite every blessed moss-back who said 'impossible!' It would n't please me or anything, would it, to stand at the door and see 'em come in? Oh, no!"

There was a stir in the next room, and Allison called him, softly.

"Yes?" It was only a word, but the tone, as always, was vibrant with good cheer.

"I just wanted to tell you," Allison said, "that my heart is over the bar."

In the dark, the two men's hands met. "More good business," commented Doctor Jack. "Just remember what somebody said

Answering the Signal

of Columbus: 'One day, with life and hope and heart, is time enough to find a world.' Go to sleep now. I 'll see you in the morning."

"All right," Allison returned, but he did not sleep, even after certain low sounds usually associated with comfortable slumber came from the doctor's room. He lay there, waiting happily, while from far, mysterious sources, life streamed into him, as the sap rises into the trees at the call of Spring. Across the despairing darkness, a signal had been flashed to him, and he was answering it, in every fibre of body and soul.

XX

Risen from the Dead

Discouraged

COLONEL KENT, in a distant structure which, by courtesy, was called "the hotel," had pushed away his breakfast untasted, save for a small portion of the nondescript fluid the frowsy waitress called "coffee." He had been delayed, missed his train at the junction point, and, fretting with impatience, had been obliged to pass the night there.

He had wired to Madame Francesca the night before, but, as yet, had received no answer. He had personally consulted every surgeon of prominence in the surrounding country, and all who would not say flatly, without further information than he could give them, that there was no chance, had been asked to go and see for themselves.

One by one, their reports came back to him, unanimously hopeless. Heartsick and discouraged, he rallied from each disappointment, only to face defeat again. He had spent weeks in fruitless journeying, following up

"Human Interest" Story

every clue that presented itself, waited days at hospitals for chiefs of staff, and made the dreary round of newspaper offices, where knowledge of every conceivable subject is supposedly upon file for the asking.

One enterprising editor, too modern to be swayed by ordinary human instincts, had turned the Colonel over to the star reporter—a young man with eyes like Allison's. By well-timed questions and sympathetic offers of assistance, he dragged the whole story of his wanderings from the unsuspecting old soldier.

It made a double page in the Sunday edition, including the illustrations—a "human interest" story of unquestionable value, introduced by a screaming headline in red: "Old Soldier on the March to Save Son. Violinist about to Lose Hand."

When the Colonel saw it, his eyes filled so that he could not see the words that danced through the mist, and the paper trembled from his hands to the floor. He was too nearly heartbroken to be angry, and too deeply hurt to take heed of the last stab.

No word reached him until late at night, when he arrived at the metropolitan hotel that he had made his headquarters. When he registered, two telegrams were handed to him, and he tore them open eagerly. The first was from Madame Francesca:

Two Bits of Yellow Paper

"Slight change for the better. New man gives hope. Better return at once."

The second one was wholly characteristic:

"Willing to take chance. Am camping on job. Come home." It was signed: "J. E. Middlekauffer."

When he got to his room, the Colonel sat down to think. He knew no one of that name —had never even heard it before. Perhaps Francesca—it would have been like her, to work with him and say nothing until she had something hopeful to say.

His heart warmed toward her, then he forgot her entirely in a sudden realisation of the vast meaning of the two bits of yellow paper. Why, it was hope; it was a fighting chance presenting itself where hitherto had been only despair! He could scarcely believe it. He took the two telegrams closer to the light, and read the blessed words over and over again, then, trembling with weakness and something more, tottered back to his chair.

Until then, he had not known how weary he was, nor how the long weeks of anxiety and fruitless effort had racked him to the soul. As one may bear a burden bravely, yet faint the moment it is lifted, his strength failed him in the very hour that he had no need of it. He sat there for a long time before he was able to shut off the light and creep into bed, with his tear-wet cheek pillowed upon one telegram,

A Living Reality

and a wrinkled hand closely clasping the other, as though holding fast to the message meant the keeping of the hope it brought.

Utterly exhausted, he slept until noon. When he woke, it was with the feeling that something vitally important had happened. He could not remember what it was until he heard the rustling of paper and saw the two telegrams. He read them once more, in the clear light of day, fearing to find the message but a fantasy of the night. To his unbounded relief, it was still there—no dream of water to the man dying of thirst, but a living reality that sunlight did not change.

"Thank God," he cried aloud, sobbing for very joy, "Thank God!"

Meanwhile, the Resourceful One had shown the nurse how to cut a sleeve out of one of Allison's old coats, and open the under-arm seam. Having done this, she was requested to treat a negligee shirt in the same way. Then the village barber was sent for, and instructed to do his utmost.

"Funny," remarked Doctor Jack, pensively, "that nobody has thought of doing that before. If I had n't come just as I did, you 'd soon have looked like a chimpanzee, and, eventually, you 'd have been beyond the reach of anything but a lawn-mower. They did n't even think to braid your hair and tie it with a blue ribbon."

Importance of a Hat

The nurse laughed; so did Allison, but the pensive expression of the young man's face did not change.

"I 've had occasion lately," he continued, "to observe the powerful tonic effect of clothes. A woman patient told me once that the moral support afforded by a well-fitting corset was inconceivable to the mind of a mere man. She said that a corset is to a woman what a hat is to a man—it prepares for any emergency, enables one to meet life on equal terms, and even to face a rebellious cook or janitor with 'that repose which marks the caste of Vere de Vere.'"

"I 've often wondered," returned Allison, "why I felt so much—well, so much more adequate with my hat on."

"Clear case of inherited instincts. The wild dog used to make himself a smooth bed in the rushes of long grass by turning around several times upon the selected spot. Consequently, the modern dog has to do the same stunt before he can go to sleep. The hat is a modification of the helmet, which always had to be worn outside the house, in the days when hold-ups and murders were even more frequent than now, and the desire for a walking-stick comes from the old fashion of carrying a spear or a sword. If a man took off his helmet, it was equivalent to saying: 'In the presence of my friend, I am safe.' When he takes off his hat

Merely Sense

to a lady now, he merely means: 'You 're not a voter.' You 'll notice that in any gathering of men, helmets are still worn."

So he chattered, with apparent unconcern, but, none the less, he was keenly watching his patient. With tact that would have done credit to a diplomat, he kept the conversation in agreeable channels. By noon, Allison had his clothes on, the coat being pinned under the left arm with two safety pins that did not show, and was out upon an upper veranda.

Doctor Jack encouraged him to walk whenever he felt that he could, even though it was only to the other end of the veranda and back to his chair. Somewhat to his astonishment, Allison began to feel better.

"I believe you 're a miracle-worker," he said. "Two days ago, I was in bed, with neither strength, ambition, nor hope. Now I 've got all three."

"No miracle," replied the other modestly. "Merely sense."

That afternoon the Crosby twins telephoned to know whether they might call, and the nurse brought the query upstairs. "If they 're amusing," said the doctor, "let 'em come."

Allison replied that the twins had been highly amusing—until they ran "The Yellow Peril" over his left hand. "Poor little devils," he mused; "they 've got something on their minds."

"I Don't Know"

"Mighty lucky for you that it was n't a macadamised boulevard instead of a sandy country road," observed the doctor. "The softness underneath has given us a doubt to work on."

"How so?"

"It 's easier to crush anything on a hard surface than it is on a pillow, is n't it?"

"Of course—I had n't thought of that. If there had been more sand——"

"I look to you to furnish that," returned the other with a quick twist of meaning. "You 've got plenty of sand, if you have half a chance to show it."

"How long—when do you think you 'll know?" Allison asked, half afraid of the answer.

"If I knew, I 'd be glad to tell you, but I don't. I 've found out that it 's easier to say 'I don't know' straight out in plain English than it is to side-track. It used to be bad form, professionally, to admit ignorance, but it is n't now. People soon find it out and you might as well tell 'em at the start. You just go on and keep the fuel bins well supplied and the red corpuscles busy and pretty soon we 'll see what 's doing."

The twins were late in coming, because they had had a long discussion as to the propriety of wearing their sable garments. Romeo, disliking the trouble of changing, argued that

The Twins Call

Allison ought to see that their grief was sincere. Juliet insisted that the sight would prove depressing.

At the end of a lively hour, they compromised upon white, which was worn by people in mourning and was not depressing. Juliet donned a muslin gown and Romeo put on his tennis flannels, which happened to be clean. As they took pains to walk upon the grass and avoid the dusty places, they were comparatively fresh when they arrived, though very warm from the long walk.

Both had inexpressibly dreaded seeing Allison, yet the reality lacked the anticipated terror, as often happens. They liked Doctor Jack immensely from the start and were greatly relieved to see Allison up and outdoors, instead of lying in a darkened room.

Almost before they knew it, they were describing their sacrificial rites and their repentance, with a wealth of detail that left nothing to be desired. Doctor Jack was suddenly afflicted with a very bad cough, but he kept his back to them and used his handkerchief a great deal. Even Allison was amused by their austere young faces and the earnest devotion with which they had performed their penance.

"We 've had your car fixed," said Romeo. "It 's all right now."

"We 've paid the bill," added Juliet.

"We want to pay everything," Romeo continued.

"Everything," she echoed.

"I don't know that I want the car," Allison answered, kindly. "If I had been a good driver, I could have backed into the turn before you got there and let you whiz by. I 'm sorry yours is burned. Won't you take mine?"

"No," answered Romeo, with finality.

"We don't deserve even to ride in one," Juliet remarked. "We ought to have to walk all the rest of our lives."

"You people make me tired," interrupted Doctor Jack. "Just because you 've been mixed up in an accident, you 're about to get yourselves locoed, as they say out West, on the subject of automobiles. By careful cultivation, you could learn to shy at a baby carriage and throw a fit at the sight of a wheelbarrow. The time to nip that is right at the start."

"How would you do it?" queried Allison. His heart was heavy with dread of all automobiles, past, present, and to come."

"Same way they break a colt. Get him used to the harness, then to shafts, and so on. Now, I can run any car that ever was built—make it stand on its hind wheels if I want to and roll through a crowd without making anybody even wink faster. I think I 'll go out

The Breaking In

and get that one and take the whole bunch of you out for a cure."

Juliet was listening attentively, with her blue eyes wide open and her scarlet lips parted. Doctor Jack was subtly conscious of a new sensation.

"I see," she said. "Romie made me hold snakes by their tails until I was n't afraid of 'em, and made me kill mice and even rats. Only sissy girls are afraid of snakes and rats. And just because we were both afraid to go by the graveyard at night, we made ourselves do it. We can walk through it now, even if there is n't any moon, and never dodge a single tombstone."

"Was it hard to learn to do it?" asked the doctor. If he was amused, he did not show it now.

"No," Juliet answered, "because just before we did it, we read about it 's being called 'God 's Acre.' So I told Romie that God must be there as much or more than He was anywhere else, so how could we be afraid?"

"After you once get it into your head that God is everywhere," added Romeo, "you can't be afraid because there 's nothing to be afraid of."

The simple, child-like faith appealed to both men strongly. Allison was much surprised, for he had not imagined that there was a serious side to the twins.

The Sacrifice Over

"Will you forgive us?" asked Juliet, humbly.

"Please," added Romeo.

"With all my heart," Allison responded, readily. "I've never thought there was anything to forgive."

"Then our sacrifice is over," cried Juliet, joyously.

"Yes," her brother agreed, with a wistful expression on his face, "and to-night we can have something to eat."

The twins never lingered long after the object of a visit was accomplished, so they rose almost immediately to take their departure. "Cards, Romie," Juliet suggested, in an audible whisper.

Romeo took a black bordered envelope from an inner pocket and gravely extended a card to each. Then they bowed themselves out, resisting with difficulty the temptation to slide down the banister instead of going downstairs two steps at a time.

Doctor Jack's mobile face had assumed an entirely new expression. He put away the card inscribed *The Crosby Twins* as though it were an article of great value, then leaned out over the veranda railing to catch a glimpse of the two flying figures in white.

"Upon my word!" he exclaimed.

Allison laughed aloud. "You're not disappointed in the twins, are you?"

"If I were going to be run over," remarked

A Walk in the Garden

the Doctor, ignoring the question, "I believe I 'd choose them to do it. Think of the little pagans burning their car and repenting in sackcloth and ashes, not to mention shooting the dogs and living upon penitential fare."

"Poor kids," Allison said, with a sigh.

"Tell me about 'em," pleaded Doctor Jack. "Tell me everything you know about 'em, especially Juliet."

"I don't know much," replied the other, "for I came back here only a few months ago, and when I went abroad, they were merely *enfants terribles* imperfectly controlled by a pair of doting parents."

However, he gladly told what he knew of the varied exploits of the twins, and his eager listener absorbed every word. At length when Allison could think of no more, and the afternoon shadows grew long, they went in.

Consigning his patient to the care of the nurse, the Doctor went down into the garden, to walk back and forth upon the long paths, gaze, open-mouthed, down the road, and moon, like the veriest schoolboy, over Juliet's blue eyes.

Her pagan simplicity, her frank boyishness, and her absolute unconsciousness of self, appealed to him irresistibly. "The dear kid," he said to himself, fondly; "the blessed little kid! Wonder how old she is!"

Then he remembered that Allison had told

"Juliet for Me!"

him the twins were almost twenty-one, but Juliet seemed absurdly young for her years. "The world will take her," he sighed to himself, "and change her in a little while so even her own brother won't know her. She 'll lace, and wear high heels and follow the latest fashion whether it suits her or not, and touch up her pretty cheeks with rouge, twist her hair into impossible coiffures, and learn all the wicked ways of the world."

The wavy masses of tawny hair, the innocent blue eyes, as wide and appealing as a child's, the clear, rosy skin, and the parted scarlet lips—all these would soon be spoiled by the thousand deceits of fashion.

"And I can't help it," he thought, sadly. Then his face brightened. "By George," he said aloud, "I 'm only twenty-eight—wonder if the kid could learn to stand me around the house." He laughed, from sheer joy. "I 'll have a try for her," he continued to himself. "Me for Juliet, and, if the gods are kind, Juliet for me!"

His reflections were interrupted by the arrival of the station hack. He instantly surmised that the man who hurried toward the house was Colonel Kent, and, on the veranda, intercepted him.

"Colonel Kent?"

"Yes. Doctor——?

"Middlekauffer, for purposes of introduc-

tion. For purposes of conversation, 'Doctor Jack,' or just plain 'Jack.' Never cared much for handles to names. You got my wire?"

"Yes. Who sent you here?"

"Forbes. Down here on the fifth. Met him out in the next State, at an operation. He told me to come, as my business was the impossible. Told me you 'd stand for it, don't you know, and all that sort of thing?"

"I 'm very glad. How is he?"

"Doing very nicely, all things considered."

"Is there a chance?" the Colonel cried, eagerly; "a real chance?"

"My dear man, until amputation is the only thing to be done, there 's always a chance. Personally, I 'm very hopeful, though I 've been called a dreamer more than once. But we 've got him chirked up a lot, and he 's getting his nerve back, and this morning I thought I detected a slight improvement, though I was afraid to tell him so. We 've all got to work for him and work like the devil at that."

"If work will do it——"

"Nothing worth while is ever done without work. Go up and see him."

At the sound of a familiar step upon the stair, Allison turned deathly white. He waited, scarcely daring to breathe, until the half-closed door opened, and his father stood before him, smiling in welcome. Allison

A Cry of Joy

sprang forward, unbelieving, until his hand touched his father's, not cold, as though he had risen from the grave, but warmly human and alive.

"Lad, dear lad! I 've come back at last!"

Allison's answering cry of joy fairly rang through the house. "Dad! Oh, Dad! I thought you were dead!"

XXI

Saved—and Lost

Hope and Doubt

ALTERNATELY possessed by hope and doubt, the young surgeon worked during the weeks that followed as he had never worked before. He kept his doubt to himself, however, and passed on his hope to the others when he could do so conscientiously. Allison had ceased to ask questions, but eagerly watched the doctor's face. He knew, without being told, just when the outlook was dubious and when it was encouraging.

The doctor did not permit either Rose or Colonel Kent to hope too much. Both were with Allison constantly, and Madame drove over three or four times a week. Gradually a normal atmosphere was established, and, without apparent effort, they kept Allison occupied and amused.

It seemed only natural and right that Rose should be there, and both Allison and his father had come to depend upon her, in a way, as though she were the head of the household. The servants came to her for orders, people

On the Old Friendly Footing

who came to inquire for Allison asked for her, and she saved the Colonel from many a lonely evening after Allison had said good-night and the Doctor had gone out for a long walk as he said, "to clear the cobwebs from his brain."

Because of Isabel, whom he felt that he could not meet, the Colonel did not go over to Bernard's. Allison had not alluded to her in any way, but Madame had told the Colonel at the first opportunity. He had said, quietly: "A small gain for so great a loss," and made no further comment, yet it was evident that he was relieved.

Rose and Allison were back upon their old friendly footing, to all intents and purposes. Never by word or look did Rose betray herself; never by the faintest hint did Allison suggest that their relation to each other had in any way been changed. He was frankly glad to have her with him, urged her to come earlier and to stay later, and gratefully accepted every kindness she offered.

Perhaps he had forgotten—Rose rather thought he had, but her self-revelation stood before her always like a vivid, scarlet hour in a procession of grey days. Yet the sting and shame of it were curiously absent, for nothing could exceed the gentle courtesy and deference that Allison instinctively accorded her. He saw her always as a thing apart; a goddess who, through divine pity, had stooped

for an instant to be a woman—and had swiftly returned to her pedestal.

Sustained by the joy of service, Rose asked no more. Only to plan little surprises for him, to anticipate every unspoken wish, to keep him cheery and hopeful, to read or play to him without being asked—these things were as the life-blood to her heart.

She had blossomed, too, into a new beauty. The forty years had put lines of silver into her hair, but had been powerless to do more. Her lovely face, where the colour came and went, the fleeting dimple at the corner of her mouth and the crimson curve of her lips were eloquent with the finer, more subtle charm of maturity. Her shining eyes literally transfigured her. In their dark depths was a mysterious exaltation, as from some secret, holy rapture too great for words.

Allison saw and felt it, yet did not know what it was. Once at sunset, when they were talking idly of other things, he tried to express it.

"I don't know what it is, Rose, but there 's something about you lately that makes me feel —well, as though I were in a church at an Easter service. The sun through the stained glass window, the blended fragrance of incense and lilies, and the harp and organ playing the Intermezzo from *Cavalleria*—all that sort of thing, don't you know?"

A Wakeful Hour

"Why should n't your best friend be glad," she had answered gently, "when you have come to your own Easter—your rising from the dead?"

The dull colour surged into his face, then retreated in waves. "If you can be as glad as that," he returned, clearing his throat, "I 'd be a brute ever to let myself be discouraged again."

That night, during a wakeful hour, his thoughts went back to Isabel. For the first time, he saw the affair in its true light—a brief, mad infatuation. He had responded to Isabel's youth and beauty and an old moonlit garden full of roses much as his violin answered to his touch upon the strings. "Had answered," he corrected himself, trying not to flinch at the thought.

Even if his hand should heal, it was scarcely possible that he would ever play again, and he knew, as well as anyone, what brilliant promise the future had held for him. He remembered how wisely he had been trained from the very beginning; how Aunt Francesca had insisted upon mathematics, Latin, and chemistry, as well as literature, history, and modern languages.

He had protested to her only once. She had replied kindly, but firmly, that while broad culture and liberal education might not, in itself, create an artist, yet it could not possibly

Thinking Things Over

injure one. Since then, he had seen precocious children, developed in one line at the expense of all others, fail ignominiously in maturity because there was no foundation. The Child Wonder who had thrilled all Europe at nine, by his unnatural mastery of the violin, was playing in an orchestra in a Paris café, where one of the numerous boy sopranos was the head waiter.

How disappointed Aunt Francesca must be, even though she had too much self-control to show it! And his father! Allison swallowed a lump in his throat. After a lifetime of self-sacrificing devotion, the Colonel had seen all his efforts fail, but he had taken the blow standing, like the soldier that he was. In vain, many a time, Allison had wished that some of his father's fine courage might have been transmitted to him.

And Rose—dear Rose! How persistently she held the new way open before him; how steadily she insisted that the creative impulse was higher than interpretative skill! How often she had reminded him of Carlyle's stirring call: "Produce, produce! Though it be but the merest fraction of a fragment, produce it, in God's name!" He had noticed that the materials for composition were always close at hand, though she never urged him to work.

He had come gradually to depend upon Rose —a great deal more than he realised. Quite

A Blue-Ribbon Friendship

often he perceived the truth of the saying that "a blue-ribbon friendship is better than an honourable mention love." It was evident that Isabel had never loved him, though she had been pleased and flattered by his love for her.

Even at the time that Aunt Francesca and Rose had congratulated him, and he had kissed them both in friendly fashion, he had taken passing note of the difference between Isabel and Rose. Of course it was only that Isabel was made of ice and Rose of flesh and blood, but still, it was pleasant to remember that——

His thoughts began to stray into other fields. Rose was his promised wife, as far as name went, yet she treated him with the frank good comradeship that a liberal social code makes possible between men and women. As far as Rose was concerned, there was no sentiment in the world.

When she read to him, it was invariably a story of adventure or of humorous complications, or a well-chosen exposition of some recent advance in science or art. Their conversation was equally impersonal, even at the rare times they chanced to be alone. Rose made Colonel Kent, Aunt Francesca, Doctor Jack, and even the nurse equally welcome to Allison's society.

He went freely from room to room on the upper floor, but had not yet been downstairs,

Whole-hearted Devotion

as a possible slip on the steps might do irreparable injury. Doctor Jack wanted to get him downstairs and outdoors, believing that actual contact with the earth is almost as good for people as it is for plants, but saw no way to manage it without a stretcher, which he knew Allison would violently resent.

The twins came occasionally, by special invitation, though nobody noticed that it was always Doctor Jack who suggested it. Once they brought a pan of Juliet's famous fudges, which were politely appreciated by the others and extravagantly praised by the Doctor. The following day he was rewarded by a private pan of especially rich fudges—but Romeo brought it, on his way to the post-office.

There was a daily card-party upon the upper veranda, and sometimes meals were served there. The piano had been moved upstairs into a back room. The whole-hearted devotion of the household was beautiful to behold, yet underneath it all, like an unseen current, was the tense strain of waiting.

It was difficult not to annoy Doctor Jack with questions. Rose and the Colonel continually reminded themselves and each other that he would be only too glad to bring encouragement at the moment he found it, and that by quiet and patience they could help him most.

Impatient and Restless

Juliet had pleaded earnestly with Doctor Jack to save Allison's hand. "If you don't," she said, with uplifted eyes, "I 'll be miserable all the rest of my life."

"Bless your little heart," the Doctor had answered, kindly; "I 'd do 'most anything to keep you from being miserable, even the impossible, which happens to be my specialty."

She did not quite understand, but sent a burnt offering to the Doctor, in the shape of a chocolate cake. He had returned the compliment by sending her the biggest box of candy she had ever seen, and, as it arrived about noon, she and Romeo had feasted upon it until they could eat no more, and had been uncomfortably ill for two days. Romeo had attributed their misfortune to the candy itself, but Juliet believed that their constitutions had been weakened by their penitential fare, and, as soon as she was able, proved her point by finishing the last sweet morsel without painful results.

The Summer waned and tints of palest gold appeared here and there upon the maples. The warm wind had the indefinable freshness of the Autumn sea, blown far inland at dawn. Allison became impatient and restless, the Colonel went off alone for long, moody walks; even Doctor Jack began to show the effects of the long strain.

Only Rose was serene. Fortunately, no one

Called Back

guessed the tumult that lay beneath her outward calm. Her manner toward Allison was, if anything, more impersonal than ever, though she failed in no thoughtful kindness, no possible consideration. He accepted it all as a matter of course, but began to wish, vaguely, for something more.

He forebore to remind her of their strange relation, and could not allude to the night he had kissed her, while his fiancée stood near by. Yet, late one afternoon, when she had excused herself a little earlier than usual, he called her back.

"Rose?"

"Yes?" She returned quickly and stood before him, just out of his reach. "What is it? What can I do for you?"

The tone was kind but impersonal, as always. "Nothing," he sighed, turning his face away.

That night she pondered long. What could Allison want that she had not given? The blood surged into her heart for an instant, then retreated. "Nonsense," she said to herself in tremulous anger. "It 's impossible!"

Afterward it seemed continually to happen that she was alone with Allison when the time came to say good-night and drive home, or walk, escorted by Colonel Kent or the Doctor. By common consent, they seemed to make excuses to leave the room as the hour of de-

An Uplifting Joy

parture approached, and she always found it easier when someone was there.

Again, when she had made her adieux and had reached the door leading into the hall, Allison called her back.

"Yes?"

"Could n't you—just once, you know—for good-night?" he asked, with difficulty.

His face made his meaning clear. Rose bent, kissed him tenderly upon the forehead, and quickly left the room. Her heart was beating so hard that she did not know she stumbled upon the threshold, nor did she hear his low: "Thank you—dear."

That night she could not sleep. "I can't," she said to herself, miserably; "I can't possibly go on, if— Oh, why should he make it so hard for me!"

If the future was to be possible on the lines already laid down, he, too, must keep the impersonal attitude. Yet, none the less, she was conscious of an uplifting joy that would not be put aside, but insistently demanded its right of expression.

She did not dare trust herself to see Allison again, and yet she must. She could not fail him now, when he needed her so much, nor could she ask the others to see that they were not left alone. One day might be gained for respite by the plea of a headache, which is woman's friend as often as it is her enemy.

Good News

And, after that one day, what then? What other excuse could she make that would not seem heartless and cold?

It was an old saying of Aunt Francesca's that "when you can't see straight ahead, it 's because you 're about to turn a corner." She tormented herself throughout the night with futile speculations that led to nothing except the headache which she had planned to offer as an excuse.

A brief note gave her the day to herself, and also brought flowers from Allison, with a friendly note in his own hand. Doctor Jack was the messenger and took occasion to offer his services in the conquest of the headache, but Rose declined with thanks, sending down word that she preferred to sleep it off.

Though breakfast might be a movable feast at Madame's, it was always consistently late. It was nearly nine o'clock in the morning when the telephone wakened Madame from a dreamless sleep. She listened until it became annoying, but no one answered it. Finally she got up, rather impatiently, and went to it herself, anticipating Rose by only a minute.

Tremulous with suspense, Rose waited, scarcely daring to breathe until Madame turned with a cry of joy, the receiver falling from her nerveless hand. "Rose! Rose! he 's saved! Our boy is saved! He 's saved, do you understand?"

Unselfishly Glad

"Truly? Is it sure?"

"Blessedly sure! Oh, Rose, he's saved!"

The little old lady was sobbing in an ecstasy of relief.

Rose led her to a couch and waited quietly until she was almost calm, then went back to her own room. Once more her world was changed, as long ago she had seen how it must be with her should the one thing happen. She, with the others, had hoped and prayed for it; her dearest dream had come true at last, and left her desolate.

She was unselfishly glad for Allison, for the Colonel, Aunt Francesca, Doctor Jack, the sorrowing twins, and, in a way, for herself. It had been given her to serve him, and she had not hoped for more. It made things easier now, though she had not thought the corner would be turned in just this way.

Having made up her mind and completed her plans, she went to Madame as soon as she was dressed. She had hidden her paleness with so little rouge that even Madame's keen eyes could not suspect it.

"Aunt Francesca," she began, without preliminary, "I 've got to go away."

"Why, dear, and where? For how long?"

"Because I 'm so tired. Things have been hard for me—over there, lately—and I don't care where I go."

"I see," returned Madame, tenderly. "You

Going Away

want to go away for a rest. You 've needed it for a long time."

"Yes," Rose nodded, swinging easily into the lie that did not deceive either. "Oh, Aunt Francesca, can I go to-day?"

"Surely—at any hour you choose."

"And you 'll—make it right?"

"Indeed I will. I 'll just say that you 've been obliged to go away on business—to look after some investments for both of us, and I hope you 'll stay away long enough to get the rest and change you 've needed for almost a year."

"Oh, Aunt Francesca, how good you are! But where? Where shall I go?"

Madame had been thinking of that. She knew the one place where Rose could go, and attain her balance in solitude, untroubled by needless questions or explanations. With the feeling of the mother who gives her dead baby's dainty garments to a living child sorely in need, she spoke.

"To my house up in the woods—the little house where love lived, so long ago."

Rose's pale lips quivered for an instant. "What have I to do with love?"

"Go to the house where he lived once, and perhaps you may find out."

"I will—I 'll be glad to go. If I could make the next train, could you arrange to have a trunk follow me?"

The Farewell Note

"Of course. Go on, dear. I know how it happens sometimes, that one can't stay in one place any longer. I suffered from wanderlust until I was almost seventy, and it 's a long time since you 've been away."

"And you 'll promise not to tell anybody?"

"I promise."

While Rose was packing a suit-case, Madame brought her a rusty, old-fashioned key, and a card on which she had written directions for the journey. "I 've ordered the carriage," she said, "and I 'll drive down with you to see you safely off."

After the packing was completed and while there was still nearly an hour to wait before the carriage would come, Rose locked her door, and, after many failures, achieved her note:

"My dear Allison:

"You don't know how glad I am for you and how glad I shall be all the rest of my life. I 've hoped and dreamed and prayed from the very beginning that it might be so, and I believe that, in time, you 'll have back everything you have lost.

"Now that you no longer need me, I am going away to attend to some necessary business for Aunt Francesca and myself, and perhaps to rest a little while in some new place before I go back to my work.

"Of course our make-believe engagement

Closing the Door

expires automatically now, and I hope you 'll soon find the one woman meant to make you happy. I am glad to think that I 've helped you a little when you came to a hard place, for the most that any one of us may do for another is to smooth the road.

"Remember me to the others, say good-bye for me, and believe me, with all good wishes,

"Your friend always,

"Rose."

When she sealed and addressed it, she had a queer sense of closing the door, with her own hands, upon all the joy Life might have in store for her in years to come. Yet the past few weeks were secure, beyond the power of change or loss, and her pride was saved.

No one could keep her from loving him, and the thought brought a certain comfort to her sore heart. Wherever he might be and whatever might happen to him, she could still love him from afar, and have, for her very own, the woman's joy of utmost giving.

When the carriage came, she went down, and, without a word put her note into Aunt Francesca's faithful hands. Isabel had not appeared, fortunately, and it was not necessary to leave any message—Aunt Francesca would make it right, as she always had with everybody.

When the little old lady lifted her face, say-

ing: "Good-bye, dear, come back to me soon," Rose's heart misgave her. "I 'll stay," she said, brokenly; "I won't leave you."

Off and Away

But Madame only smiled, and nodded toward the waiting train. She stood on the platform, waving her little lace-bordered handkerchief, until the last car rounded the curve and the fluttering bit of white that was waved in answer had vanished.

Then Madame sighed, wiped her eyes, and drove home.

XXII

A Birthday Party

Not helpless

ALLISON received the note from Rose at the time he was expecting Rose herself, and was keenly disappointed. "She might at least have stopped long enough to say good-bye," he said to his father.

"Don't be selfish, lad," laughed the Colonel. "We owe her now a debt that we can never hope to pay."

The young man's face softened. "What a brick she has been!" Then, to himself, he added: "if she had loved me, she could n't have done more."

Life seemed very good to them both that crisp September morning. Just after breakfast Doctor Jack had announced, definitely, that the crushed hand was saved, unless there should be some unlooked-for complication "But mind you," he insisted, "I don't promise any violin-playing, and there 'll be scars, but we 'll make it look as well as we can. Anyhow, you 'll not be helpless."

How Allison Receives the News

Allison smiled happily. "Why can't I play, if it heals up all right?"

"There may be a nerve or two that won't work just right, or a twisted muscle, or something. However we'll keep hoping."

The heavy weight that had lain so long upon Allison's heart was slow in lifting. At first he could not believe the good news, greatly to Doctor Jack's disgust.

"You don't seem to care much," he remarked. "I supposed you'd turn at least one somersault. The Colonel is more pleased than you are."

"Dear old dad," said Allison, gratefully. "I owe him everything."

"Everything?" repeated the Doctor, with lifted brows. "And where does Jonathan Ebenezer Middlekauffer come in, to say nothing of the future Mrs. Kent?"

Allison's face clouded for an instant. "I'll never forget what you've done for me, but there is n't any future Mrs. Kent."

"No? Why I thought——"

"So did I, but she's thrown me over and gone away. This morning she sent me a note of congratulation and farewell."

"Upon my word! What have you done to her?"

"Nothing. She says I don't need her any more now, so she's going away."

Doctor Jack paced back and forth on the

Brace Up

veranda with his hands in his pockets. "The darkly mysterious ways of the ever-feminine are wonderful beyond the power of words to portray. Apparently you 've had to choose between your hand and hers."

"I 'm not sure," returned Allison, thoughtfully, "that I would n't rather have hers than mine."

"Brace up, old man. Get well and go after her. The world is n't big enough to keep a man away from the woman he wants."

"But," answered Allison, dejectedly, "she does n't care for me. It was only womanly pity, and now that I don't need that, I 've lost her."

"She does n't care for you!" repeated the Doctor. "Why, man, how can you sit there and tell a lie like that? Of course she cares!"

Allison turned to look at him in astonishment. "It is n't possible!"

"Is n't it? Then I don't know anything about human nature, though I must confess I 'm not up much on the feminine part of it. How long——"

"Just since the accident. The girl I was going to marry let me release her. She did n't want a cripple, you know."

"And Miss Bernard did, and you 've disappointed her?"

"Something like that."

"You seem to have had fierce luck with girls.

An Invitation

One gives you up because you 've only got one hand, and the other because you 've got two. There 's no pleasing women. Hello—here comes another note. Maybe she 's changed her mind."

For a breathless instant Allison thought so, too, but Doctor Jack was opening it. "Mine," he said. "It 's an invitation to Crosby's. It seems that they come of age day after to-morrow, and I 'm invited out to supper to help celebrate. I won't go, or anything, will I? Oh, no, of course not! I have n't seen 'em for a week. Are presents expected?"

"Your presence seems to be expected," remarked Allison.

"I 'm glad you 've got that out of your system," the Doctor retorted, with a scornful smile. "You ought to improve right along now."

"Is it a party?"

"They don't say so. I hope it is n't."

However, when Doctor Jack strolled up the dusty road, a carriage that must have come from Crosby's passed him. He stopped short, wildly considering an impulse of flight. Then he went on bravely, smiling at the thought that any entertainment given by the twins could be by any possibility, a formal affair.

The other guest was Isabel, whom Doctor Jack had not met and of whom he knew nothing. She observed him narrowly when opportunity offered, for she knew who he was, and

The Best Birthday Present

wondered what he had heard of her. Soon she became certain that her name carried no meaning to him, for he talked freely of Allison and the Colonel and frankly shared the joy of the twins at the welcome news.

"Oh," cried Juliet, clapping her hands in glee. "It 's the very best birthday present we could have, is n't it, Romie?"

"I should say," replied that young man, with an expansive smile. "Say," he added to Doctor Jack, "you must be a brick."

"I 've only done my best," he responded, modestly.

Isabel could say nothing for some little time. She was furiously angry with Aunt Francesca because she had not told her. The day that Rose went away, everyone in the house had been very glad about something, even to the servants, but she had asked no questions and received no information, except that Rose had been obliged to go away very suddenly upon business of immediate importance.

"You must be awful glad," said Juliet, to Isabel.

"Of course," answered Isabel, coldly, clearing her throat.

"He must feel pretty good," Romeo observed.

"Yes," returned Doctor Jack, "except that he 's lost his girl."

Isabel flushed and nervously turned on

Doctor Jack Puts His Foot into It

her finger the diamond ring that she still wore.

"He 's had fierce luck with girls," resumed the Doctor, unthinkingly. "One passed him up because he was hurt, and the other because he was going to get well."

The tense silence that ensued indicated that he had made a mistake of some sort. It had not occurred to him that the twins did not know of Allison's engagement to Rose, nor did he suspect Isabel's identity.

Juliet was staring at Isabel in pained surprise. "Did you?" she asked, slowly, "throw him over because he got hurt?"

"He offered to release me," said Isabel, in a small, cold voice, "and I accepted. I did not know until just now that Cousin Rose had taken my leavings." The older woman's mysterious departure presented itself to her now in a new light.

"Suffering Cyrus," said Doctor Jack, aloud, "but I have put my foot into it. Look here, kind friends, I never was meant for a parlour, and I always make mistakes when I stray into one. My place is in a hospital ward or at the bedside of those who have been given up to die. The complex social arena is not where I shine to my best advantage. There are too many rings to keep track of at once, and my mind gets cross-eyed."

"Come on up to the attic," suggested

A Word of Warning

Juliet, with a swift change of subject, "and we 'll do stunts on the trapeze."

Isabel and Doctor Jack sat side by side on a battered old trunk in stony silence while the twins were donning their gymnasium costumes. Fortunately, it did not take long and the sight of Juliet hanging by her feet furnished the needed topic of conversation. The lithe little body seemed to be made of steel fibres. She swayed back and forth, catching Romeo as he made a flying leap from the other trapeze, as easily as another girl would have wielded a tennis racquet.

At length Doctor Jack interposed a friendly word of warning. "Look here, kid," he said, "you 're made of flesh and blood, you know, just like the rest of us. Better cut out that trapeze business."

"I don't know why," returned Juliet, resentfully, as she slipped gracefully to the floor, right side up. "I 'm as strong as Romie is, or almost as strong."

"Girls do it in the circus," Romeo observed, wiping his flushed face.

"Ever heard of any of 'em living to celebrate their hundredth birthday?" queried Doctor Jack, significantly.

The twins admitted that they had not. "I don't care," cried Juliet, "I 'd rather live ten years and keep going, than live to be a hundred and have to sit still all the time."

An Unusual Dinner

"No danger of your sitting still too long," returned Doctor Jack, good-humouredly. "It 's hot up here, is n't it?"

"Rather warm," Romeo agreed. "You folks can go downstairs until we get on our other clothes, if you like."

They had reached the head of the stairs when Isabel changed her mind. "I believe I 'll wait for Juliet," she said, turning back.

So the Doctor went down alone, inwardly reviling himself for his unlucky speech, and glad of an opportunity to contemplate the characteristic residence of the twins.

The whole house was, frankly, a place where people did as they chose, and the furniture bore marks of having been used not wisely, but too well. Everything was clean, though not aggressively so. He ascribed the absence of lace curtains to Romeo and the Cloisonné vase to Juliet. The fishing rods in one corner were probably due to both.

When the others came down, Juliet tied a big blue gingham apron over her white muslin gown and excused herself. She had been cooking for the better part of two days and took a housewifely pride in doing everything herself. They had chosen the things they liked the most, so the dinner was unusual, as dinners go.

Isabel, eating daintily, made no effort to conceal her disdain, but Doctor Jack ate

Isabel and Juliet

heartily, praised everything, and brought the blush of pleasure to Juliet's rosy cheeks.

Romeo, at the head of the table, radiated the hospitality of the true host, yet a close observer would have noted how often he cast admiring glances at Isabel. She was so dainty, so beautifully gowned and elaborately coiffured, that Romeo compared her with his sister greatly to the disadvantage of the latter.

Juliet's hair was unruly and broke into curls all around her face; Isabel's was in perfect order, with every wave mathematically exact. Juliet's face was tanned and rosy; Isabel's pale and cool. Juliet's hands were rough and her finger-tips square; Isabel's were white and tapering, with perfectly manicured nails. And their gowns—there was no possible comparison there. Both were in white, but Romeo discovered that there might be a vast difference in white gowns.

Afterward, the guests were taken out into the yard, and led to the comprehensive grave of the nineteen dogs. Minerva kept at a safe distance, but the five puppies gambolled and frolicked, even to the verge of the sepulchre. Romeo desired to send a dog to Allison, and generously offered Isabel her choice, but she refused.

"I 'll take the pup," said the Doctor. "It might amuse him, and anyhow, he 'd like to know that you thought of him."

Whose Is It?

Isabel had strolled down toward the barn. Juliet hesitated, duty bidding her follow Isabel and inclination holding her back. Presently Isabel returned, and her face was surprisingly animated.

"Is that our car in the barn?" she asked. Her manner betrayed great excitement.

"Why, it 's Allison Kent's car, is n't it?" inquired Romeo.

"I thought it was mine. Colonel Kent gave it to me for a wedding present."

"I thought you could n't keep the wedding presents unless the wedding came off," Juliet observed, practically.

"I 've still got my ring," said Isabel. "Allison said he wanted me to keep it, and he gave me his violin, too. I should think they 'd want me to keep the car."

"Better make sure," suggested Doctor Jack, politely.

"People don't scatter automobiles around carelessly among their friends, as a general rule," observed Juliet.

"I wish I could get it up to Kent's," Romeo said, thoughtfully. "It always reminds me—here."

"I 'd just as soon drive it back," the Doctor answered. "It 's more of a trot out here than I supposed it was."

"Why, yes," cried Juliet. "You can drive it back to-night and take Isabel home!"

The Longed-for Auto

"Charmed," lied the Doctor, with an awkward bow.

So it happened that Isabel once more climbed into the red car and went back over the fateful road. The machine ran well, but it seemed to require the driver's entire attention, for his conversation consisted of brief remarks to which answers even more brief were vouchsafed.

When he turned, on the wide road in front of Madame Bernard's, after leaving Isabel at the gate, she lingered in the shadow, watching, until he was out of sight. The throb of the engine became fainter and fainter, then died away altogether. Isabel sighed and went in, wondering if Allison, after giving her the ring and the violin, would not also want her to have the car. Or, if that seemed too much, and she should send back the violin — she pondered over it until almost dawn, then went to sleep.

The following afternoon, while Madame Bernard slept, Isabel sat idly in the living-room, looking out of the window, though, as she told herself fretfully, there was not much use of looking out of the window when nobody ever went by. But no sooner had she phrased the thought than she heard the faint chug-chug of an approaching motor.

She moved back, into the shelter of the curtain, and presently saw the big red automobile

A Bold Venture

whizz by. Doctor Jack, hatless and laughing, was at the wheel. Beside him was Colonel Kent.

Had they gone out and left Allison alone? Surely, since there was no one else. Fortune favoured her if she wished to see him. But did she dare?

Isabel was nothing if not courageous. Arming herself with an excuse in the shape of the violin, she sallied forth and made her way to Kent's, meeting no one upon the well-worn path.

As it happened, Allison was on the lower veranda, walking back and forth, persistently accompanied by the Crosby pup. Assisted by the Colonel and Doctor Jack, he had come down without accident, and had promised to go out in the car with them a little later.

When he saw Isabel coming up the walk, he stopped in astonishment. He did not go to meet her, but offered her a chair and said, with formal politeness: "How do you do? This is an unexpected pleasure."

"I brought this," began Isabel, offering him the violin.

He took it with a smile. "Thank you. I don't know that I shall ever use it again, but I am glad to have it."

There was a pause and Isabel moved restlessly in her chair. Then she slipped the ring from her finger. "Do you want this now?"

Mistaken

she asked. Her face was a shade paler.

Allison laughed. "Indeed I don't. Whom could I give it to?"

"Rose," suggested Isabel, maliciously.

Allison sighed and turned his face away. "She would n't take it," he said, sadly.

Isabel slipped it back on her finger, evidently relieved. "I 'm glad you 're better," she went on, clearing her throat.

"Thank you. So am I."

"I saw your father, out in the car. The Doctor was with him."

"Yes. They 're coming back for me in a little while."

"It 's a lovely car. The Doctor brought me home in it last night, from Crosby's."

"So he told me." Allison did not see fit to say just how much Doctor Jack had told him. He smiled a little at the recollection of the young man's remorseful confession.

"I told them," continued Isabel, "that I thought it was mine—that your father had given it to me, but it seems I was mistaken."

"It seems so," Allison agreed. "Dad gave it to the Doctor this morning."

Isabel repressed a bitter cry of astonishment. "For keeps?"

"Yes, for keeps. It 's little enough to give him after all he 's done for me. We both wanted him to have it."

"You could get another, could n't you?"

Never the Same

"I suppose so, if I wanted it. People can usually get things they want, if they are intangible."

"I wanted to tell you," resumed Isabel, "that I was sorry I acted the way I did the last time I was here."

"Don't think of it," replied Allison, kindly. "It was very natural."

"It was all a great shock to me, and I was lame, and—and—I wish everything could be as it was before," she concluded, with a faint flush creeping into her face.

"That is the great tragedy of life, Isabel—that things can never be as they were before. Sometimes they 're worse, sometimes better, but the world is never the same."

"Of course," she answered, without grasping his meaning, "but you 're going to be all right again now, and—that 's the same."

Allison shrugged his shoulders and bit his lips to conceal a smile. "It may be the same for me, but it could n't be for you. I could n't give you any guarantee that it would n't happen again, you know. I might be run over by a railroad train or a trolley car, or any one of a thousand things might happen to me. There 's always a risk."

Tears filled Isabel's eyes. "I don't believe you ever cared very much for me," she said, her lips quivering.

"I did, Isabel," he answered, kindly, "but

Good-bye, Silver Girl

it 's gone now. Even at that, it lasted longer than you cared for me. Come, let 's be friends."

He offered his hand. She put hers into it for a moment, then quickly took it away. He noted that it was very cold.

"I must be going," she said, keeping her self-control with difficulty. "Aunt Francesca will miss me."

"Thank you for coming—and for bringing the violin."

"You 're welcome. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Silver Girl. I hope you 'll be happy."

Isabel did not answer, nor turn back. She went out of the gate and out of his life, pride keeping her head high until she had turned the corner. Then, very sorry for herself, she sat down and wept.

XXIII

"Tears, Idle Tears"

"SAY, Jule," inquired Romeo, casually, "why is it that you don't look like a lady?"

Not Like Her

"What do you mean?" demanded Juliet, bristling.

"I don't know just what I mean, but you seem so different from everybody else."

"I 'm clean, ain't I?"

"Yes," he admitted, grudgingly.

"And my hair is combed?"

"Sometimes."

"And my white dress is clean, is n't it?"

"Yes, but it does n't look like—like hers, you know."

"Her? Who 's 'her'?"

"You know—Isabel."

Juliet sighed and bit her lips. Her eyes filled with tears and she winked very hard to keep them back. An ominous pain clutched at her loyal little heart.

Juliet's Feelings Hurt

"What do you want me to do, Romie?" she asked, gently.

"Why, I don't know. Men never know about such things. Just make yourself like her—that 's all."

"Huh!" Juliet was scornful now. "I don't know whether I want to look like her or not," she remarked, coldly.

"Why not?" he flashed back.

"And I don't want to be like her, either. She can't do anything. She can't cook, or swing on the trapeze, or skate, or fish, or row, or swim, or climb a tree, or ride horseback, or walk, or anything."

"I could teach ner," mused Romeo, half to himself. "I taught you."

"Yes," cried Juliet, swallowing the persistent lump in her throat, "and now you 've done it, you 're ashamed of me!"

"I did n't say so," he temporised.

"You did n't have to. Don't you suppose I can see?"

"Don't get so mad about it. She was laughing at you last night and so was the Doctor. They did n't think it was nice for you to put on your knickers and swing on the trapeze. Ladies don't do that."

"You taught me," she reminded him, quickly.

"Yes, but I did n't ask you to do it before everybody. You started it yourself. Isabel

would n't look at you, and you remember what the Doctor said, don't you? He told you to cut it out."

"That was because he thought it was dangerous."

"'T is n't dangerous, and he knows it. He knew it was n't refined and lady-like for you to do that before men."

"It was only a doctor," Juliet replied, in a small, thin voice. "They 're different from other people. I would n't let the Kents see me in my knickers, and you know it."

"You would, too, if you wanted to. You 're a perfect tomboy. You would n't see Isabel doing that."

"Probably not," answered Juliet, dryly. "She 's no more likely to do that than I would be to go back on the man I 'd promised to marry, just because his hand was hurt."

"You 'll never have a chance to go back on anybody, so you don't know what you 'd do."

"Why won't I?"

"Because," answered Romeo, choosing his words carefully, "when a man gets married, he wants to marry a lady, not a tomboy." For some unknown reason, he resented any slur cast at Isabel.

"And," replied Juliet, cuttingly, "when a lady gets married, she wants to marry a gentleman." The accent carried insult with it, and Romeo left the house, slamming the

Before the Mirror

door and whistling defiantly until he was out of hearing.

There was no longer any need for Juliet to keep back the tears. Stretched at full length upon the disembowelled sofa, she buried her face in the pillow and wept until she could weep no more. Then she bathed her face, and pinned up her tangled hair, and went to the one long mirror the Crosby mansion boasted of, to take an inventory of herself.

She could see that Romeo was right—she did n't look like a lady. Her skirt was too short and did n't hang evenly, and her belt was wrong because she had no corsets. Juliet made a wry face at the thought of a corset. None of her clothes fitted like Isabel's, her face was tanned, her hands rough and red, and her nails impossible.

"I look just like a boy," Juliet admitted to herself, "dressed up in girl's clothes. If Romie's hair was long, and he had on this dress, he 'd look just like me."

Pride forbade her to go to Isabel and inquire into the mysteries of her all-pervading femininity. Anyhow, Isabel would laugh at her. Anybody would laugh at her—unless Miss Bernard—but she had gone away. She was a lady, even more than Isabel, and so was the little old lady everybody called "Aunt Francesca."

If she could see "Aunt Francesca," she

A Plan of Action

would n't be ashamed to tell her what Romeo had said. If she only knew what to do, she could do it, for she had plenty of money. Juliet dimly discerned that money was very necessary if one would be the same sort of "lady" that the others were.

"If Mamma had n't died," said Juliet, to herself, "I guess I 'd have been as much of a lady as anybody, and nobody would have dared call me a tomboy." Her heart ached for the gentle little mother who had died many years ago. "She would have known," sighed Juliet. "Mamma was a lady if anybody ever was, and she did n't have the money we 've got either."

The life of the Crosbys had been bare of luxuries and sometimes even of comforts, until the considerate uncle died and left his money to the twins. As fortunes go, it was not much, but it seemed inexhaustible to them because they did not know how to spend it.

"I 'll go this very day," thought Juliet, "and see Aunt Francesca. I 'll ask her. If Isabel is there, I 'll have to wait, but if I don't ask for Isabel, maybe I won't see her."

Having decided upon a plan of action, the way seemed easier, so Juliet went about her daily duties with a lighter heart, and even sang after a fashion, as she awkwardly pressed the wrinkles from her white muslin gown. Though it was September, it was still warm enough to wear it.

Angry Romeo

Romeo, having only the day before attained his maturity, had taken unto himself the masculine privilege of getting angry at someone else for what he himself had done. He was furious with Juliet, though he did not trouble himself to ask why. "The idea," he muttered, "of her criticising Isabel!"

His wounded sensibilities impelled him to walk past the Bernard house, very slowly, two or three times, but there was no one in sight. He went to the post-office as a mere matter of habit; there was seldom any mail for the Crosbys except on the first of the month, when the lawyer's formal note, "enclosing remittance," came duly to hand. Nobody seemed to be around—there was nothing to do. It would have been natural to go back home, but he was too angry for that, and inwardly vowed to stay away long enough to bring Juliet to her senses.

He recalled the night he had called upon Isabel and had not reached home until late. He remembered the torrent of tears and Juliet's cry: "Oh, Romie! Romie! I don't care where you 've been as long as I 've got you back!" It pleased his masculine sense of superiority to know that he had power over a woman's tears—to make them come or go, as he chose.

He sauntered slowly toward Kent's, thinking that he might while away an hour or two there.

It was a long time until midnight, and there seemed to be nothing to do but to sit and wait. He could ask about the car and whether it was all right now. If Doctor Jack could run it, maybe they could go out together for a little spin. It would be nice to go by his own house and never even turn his head. And, if they could get Isabel to go, too, it would teach Juliet a much-needed lesson.

He had nearly reached his destination when he came upon the picture of Beauty in Distress. Isabel sat at the roadside, leaning against a tree, sobbing. Romeo gave a long, low whistle of astonishment. "Say," he called, cheerfully, "what 's wrong?"

Isabel looked up, wiped her eyes, and began to weep more earnestly. Though Juliet's tears had moved him to anger and disdain, Isabel's grief roused all his chivalry. He sat down beside her and tried to take her handkerchief away from her eyes.

"Don't," he said, softly. "What 's the matter?"

"Oh," sobbed Isabel, "I 'm the most miserable girl in the whole world. Nobody wants me!"

"What makes you say that?" demanded Romeo. "Look here, if you 'll tell me who 's been making you cry, I 'll——"

He did not finish the sentence, but his tone indicated that dire misfortune would be visited

Isabel's Tale of Woe

upon the luckless individual directly responsible for Isabel's tears.

"You know," began Isabel, after her sobs had quieted somewhat, "I was engaged to Allison Kent until you ran over us. At first I could n't go over—I was so bruised and lame and before I was well enough to go, I got a note from him, releasing me from the engagement."

"Yes?" queried Romeo, encouragingly. "Go on."

"Well, I did n't think I ought to go over, under the circumstances, but Aunt Francesca made me go—she 's been mean to me, too. So I went and he was horrid to me—perfectly horrid. I offered him his ring and he almost threw his violin at me, and told me to keep that, too. I was afraid of him.

"Well, since that, everything has been awful. I wrote to Mamma and told her about it and that I could n't stay here any longer, and she did n't answer for a long time. Then she said I would have to stay where I was until she could make new arrangements for me and that she was glad I was n't going to marry a cripple. She said something about 'the survival of the unfit,' but I did n't understand it.

"And then, last night, when I heard that Allison was n't going to lose his hand after all, I thought I ought to take his violin back to him and try to well,—to make up, you know. So

The Flash of an Idea

I 've just been there. He took the violin all right, but he did n't seem to want me. He said nothing could ever be as it was before. I was ready to get married and go away—I 'd do almost anything for a change—but he actually seemed to be glad to get rid of me and they 've given my automobile, that Colonel Kent himself gave to me for a wedding present, to that doctor who was out to your house last night. Oh," sobbed Isabel, "I wish I was dead. If you only had n't run over us, everything would have been all right!"

Romeo's young face was set in stern and unaccustomed lines. He, then, was directly responsible for Isabel's tears. He had run over them and hurt Isabel and made everything wrong for her, and, because she was a lady, she was n't blaming him in the least. She had merely pointed out to him, as gently as she could, what he had done to her.

A bright idea flashed into his mind, as he remembered that he was twenty-one now and could do as he pleased without consulting anybody. He reached into his pocket, drew out a handful of greenbacks and silver, even a gold piece or two. It would serve Juliet just right and make up to Isabel for what he had done.

"I say, Isabel," he began awkwardly. "Would you be willing to marry me?"

Isabel quickly dried her tears. "Why, I don't know," she answered, much astonished.

Isabel Consents

Then the practical side of her nature asserted itself. "Have you got money enough?"

Romeo tendered the handful of currency. "All this, and plenty more in the bank."

"I know, but it was the bank I was talking about. Have you got enough for us to live at a nice hotel and go to the theatre every night?"

"More than that," Romeo asserted, confidently. "I 've got loads."

"I—don't know," said Isabel, half to herself. "It would serve them all right. Allison used to be jealous of you," she added, with a sidelong glance that set his youthful heart to fluttering.

"Juliet is jealous of you," Romeo responded disloyally. "We had an awful scrap this morning because I asked her why she did n't try to be a lady, like you."

"Of course," replied Isabel, smoothing her gown with a dainty hand, "I 've always liked Juliet, but I liked you better."

"Really, Isabel? Did you always like me?"

"Always."

"Then come on. Let 's skip out now, the way they do in the books. Let 's take the next train."

"Why not get married here?" objected Isabel, practically, "and take the four-thirty into town? There 's a minister here, and while you 're seeing about it, I can go home and get my coat."

A Joke

"All right, but don't stop for anything else. We 've got to hustle. Don't tell anybody."

"Not even Aunt Francesca?"

"No, she 'd make a fuss. And besides, she does n't deserve it, if she 's been mean to you." Romeo leaned over and bestowed a meaningless peck upon the fair cheek of his betrothed. "I 'll never be mean to you," he said.

"I know you won't," Isabel returned, trustfully. Then she laughed as she rose to her feet. "It will be a good joke on Allison," she said, gleefully.

"It 'll be a good joke on everybody," Romeo agreed, happily.

"Listen," said Isabel. A faint chug-chug was heard in the distance, gradually coming nearer. "It 's my car. I wish you had n't been so quick to get rid of it last night. We could have gone away in it now."

"Never mind, I 'll buy you another."

They hoped to reach the turn in the road before the car got there, but failed. Doctor Jack came to a dead stop. "Want a lift?" he asked.

"No, thank you," said Romeo.

"No, thank you," repeated Isabel, primly. Colonel Kent had greeted her with the most chilling politeness, and she burned to get away.

"Say," resumed Romeo, "will you do something for me?"

Romeo's Note

"Sure," replied the Doctor, cordially. "Anything."

"Will you take a note out to my sister for me? I shan't get back for—some time."

"You bet. Where is it?"

"I have n't written it yet. Just wait a minute."

Romeo tore a leaf from an old memorandum book which he carried, and wrote rapidly:

"DEAR JULE:

"Isabel and I have gone away to get married. You can have half of everything. I 'll let you know where to send my clothes.

"R. C."

He was tempted to add an apology for what he had said earlier in the day, but his newly acquired importance made him refrain from anything so compromising.

He folded the note into a little cocked hat and addressed it. "Much obliged," he said, laconically. "So long."

"So long," returned Doctor Jack, starting the engine.

"Good-bye," said the Colonel, lifting his hat.

Romeo left Isabel at Madame Bernard's gate. "Hurry up," he said, in a low tone. "I 'll meet you under the big elm down the road."

"All right," she whispered.

Madame Bernard was asleep, so Isabel

Making a Record

hastily crammed a few things into a suit-case and slipped out of the house, unseen and unheard. As the half-starved minister of the country parish was sorely in need of the generous fee Romeo pressed upon him in advance, the arrangements were pitifully easy. He was at the trysting place fully ten minutes before she came in sight, staggering under the unaccustomed burden of a heavy suit-case.

It might not have occurred to him to relieve Juliet of a cumbrous piece of baggage, but he instinctively took it from Isabel. "Come on," he said. "We 've got to hurry if we don't want to miss the four-thirty."

"How long does it take to get married?" queried Isabel.

"Not long, I guess. See how people fool around over it, and we 're getting through with it in one afternoon. We 're making a record, I guess."

It seemed that they were, for when they came to the shabby little brown house, near the big white church, the minister, his wife, and a next-door neighbour were waiting. In a very short time, the ceremony was over and Mr. and Mrs. Romeo Crosby were on the train, speeding toward their honeymoon and the lively years that undoubtedly lay ahead of them.

Allison had changed his mind about going out that afternoon, but promised to go next

The Fateful Message

time. Colonel Kent remained at home, and Doctor Jack sped away alone upon his errand.

When he reached Crosby's, Juliet, clad in her best, was just leaving the house. She was outwardly cheerful, but her face still bore traces of tears.

"Where were you going?" asked the Doctor, as Juliet greeted him. There was a new shyness in her manner, as of some unwonted restraint.

"I was going into town. I wanted to see Aunt Francesca." She slipped easily into the habit of the others, seldom hearing the name "Madame Bernard."

"I 'll take you. Here 's a note from your brother."

Juliet opened it, read the fateful message, and turned white as death.

"What is it?" asked the Doctor, much alarmed.

In answer, she offered him the note, her hand shaking pitifully. The Doctor read it twice before he grasped the full meaning of it. "Well, I 'll be—" he said, half to himself.

Unable to stand, Juliet sat down upon the well-worn door-step and he sat down beside her. "It 's all my fault," she said, solemnly. "Romie told me this morning that I was n't a lady, and he wanted me to be like her. He said I was a tomboy, and I told him that if I was,

Wholly New to Juliet

he 'd done it himself, and he got mad and went away, and now——"

Juliet burst into tears, but she had no handkerchief, so Doctor Jack gave her his.

"'Tears, idle tears,'" he quoted lightly. "I say, kid, don't take it so hard."

"I—I 'm not a lady," she sobbed.

"You are," he assured her. "You 're the finest little lady I know."

"Don't—don't," she sobbed. "Don't make fun of me. Romie said that you were—laughing at me—yesterday—because I was—a—a tomboy!"

"Kid," he said, softly, almost unmanned by a sudden tenderness quite foreign to his experience. "Oh, my dear little girl, won't you look at me?"

The tone was wholly new to Juliet—she did not know that any man could be so tender, so beautifully kind. "It 's because he 's a doctor," she thought. "He 's used to seeing people when they don't feel right."

"I 'm so sorry," he was saying. "Your brother did n't mean anything by it, little girl. He was just teasing."

"He was n't," returned Juliet, wiping her eyes. "Don't you think I know when he s teasing and when he is n't? I 'm not a lady; I 'm only a tomboy, and now he 's gone away with her and left me all alone."

"You 'll never be alone if I can help it," he

"I'll Wait"

assured her, fervently. "Look here, do you suppose you could ever learn to like me?"

"Why, I like you now—I've always liked you."

"I know, but I don't mean that. Do you think you could ever like me a whole lot? Enough to marry me, I mean?"

"Why, I don't know—I never thought—" Juliet's voice trailed off into an inarticulate murmur of astonishment.

"Won't you try?" he pleaded. "Oh, Juliet, I've loved you ever since I first saw you!"

The high colour surged into her face. He was not joking—he meant every word. Even Juliet could see that.

"Won't you try, dear? That's all I'll ask for, now."

"Why, yes," she said, her wide blue eyes fixed upon his. "I'd try almost anything—for you, but I'm only a tomboy."

Doctor Jack caught her cold little hands in his. "Kiss me," he said, huskily.

Juliet's face burned, but she lifted her lips to his, obediently and simply as a child. The man hesitated for an instant, then pushed her away from him; not unkindly, but firmly.

"No, I won't take it, Princess," he said, in a strange tone. "I'll wait until you wake up."

"I'm—not asleep," she stammered.

"You are in some ways." Then he added, irrelevantly, "Thank God!"

"I don't know," remarked Juliet, at the end of an uncomfortable pause, "what to do with myself. I don't want to stay here alone and I would n't go anywhere near them—not for the world."

"Where did you say you were going, when I came?"

"To Aunt Francesca's—Madame Bernard, you know."

"Good business," he answered, nodding vigorous approval. "Come on. She seems to be the unfailing refuge of the shipwrecked mariner in this district. If I'm not much mistaken, she'll take you into her big house and her bigger heart."

"Oh," said Juliet, wistfully, "do you think she would take me—and make me into a lady?"

"I think she'll take you," he responded, after a brief struggle with himself, "but I don't want you made over. I want you to stay just exactly as you are. Oh, you dear little kid," he muttered, "you 'll try to care, won't you?"

"I 'll try," she promised, sweetly, as she climbed into the big red machine. "I did n't think I 'd ever be in this car."

"You can come whenever you like. It 's mine, now."

Juliet did not seem to hear. The car

Growing Up

hummed along the dusty road, making a soothing, purring noise. Pensively she looked across the distant fields, whence came the hum and whir of reaping. There was a far-away look in her face that the man beside her was powerless to understand. She was making swift readjustments as best she might, and, wisely, he left her to herself.

As they approached Madame Bernard's, Juliet turned to him. "I was just thinking," she sighed, "how quickly you grow up after you get to be twenty-one."

He made no answer. He swallowed hard and turned the car into the driveway. Aunt Francesca came out on the veranda, followed by Mr. Boffin, as Juliet jumped out of the car. She had the crumpled note in her cold little hand.

Without a word, she offered it to Madame Bernard and waited. The beautiful face instantly became soft with pity. "My dear child," she breathed. "My dear little motherless child!"

Juliet went into her open arms as straight as a homing pigeon to its nest. "Oh, Aunt Francesca," she sobbed, "will you take me and make a lady out of me?"

"You 're already a lady," laughed the older woman amid her tears. "Come in, Juliet dear—come home!"

XXIV

The House Where Love Lived

Autumn

IT was past the middle of October, and Allison's injured hand was not only free of its bandages, but he had partially regained the use of it. Doctor Jack still lingered, eagerly seizing every excuse that presented itself.

"I suppose I ought to be back looking for another job," he regretfully observed to Allison, "but I like it here, and besides, I want to hear you play on your fiddle before I go."

Allison laughed and hospitably urged him to stay as long as he chose. Colonel Kent added, heartily, after an old Southern fashion: "My house is yours."

Crimson and golden leaves rained from the maples, and the purple winds of Autumn swept them into drifts at the roadside. Amethystine haze shimmered in the valleys and lay, cloud-like, upon the distant hills. Through the long aisles of trees a fairy patter of tiny furred feet rustled back and forth upon the fallen leaves. Only a dropping nut or a busy squirrel broke the exquisite peace of the forest,

A World of Change

where the myriad life of the woods waited, in hushed expectancy, for the tide of the year to turn.

Like a scarlet shuttle plying through the web of Autumn, the big red touring car hummed and whirred, with a happy young man at the wheel and a laughing girl beside him. Juliet's momentary self-consciousness was gone, and she was her sunny self again, though she still occasionally wept in secret, longing for her brother.

"Aunt Francesca," she said, one day, when the two were sewing on dainty garments destined to adorn Juliet, "do you think Romie will ever come back to me?"

"Not in the sense you mean, dear," replied Madame, gently. "We live in a world of change and things are never the same, even from day to day."

"She made him think I was a tomboy, and now she 'll teach him not to love me. Why does she want everything?"

"Some women do, when they marry. Many are not content to be sweetheart and wife, but must take the place of mother and sisters too. But remember, Juliet, when a woman closes a man's heart against those of his own blood, the one door she has left open will some day be slammed in her own face."

"And then——?"

"Then the other doors will swing ajar,

turning slowly on rusty hinges, but the women for whom they are opened will never cross the threshold again."

"Why?"

"Because they have ceased to care. There is nothing so dead as a woman's dead love. When the fire goes out and no single ember is left, the ashes are past the power of flame to rekindle."

"Do you think that, after a while, I won't care for Romie any more?"

"Not as you used to—that is impossible even now."

Juliet sighed and hastily wiped away a tear. With a quick, sure stroke, her life seemed to have been divided.

"Don't, dear. Remember what you have had. I often think a woman has crossed the line between youth and maturity, when she begins to put away, in the lavender of memory, the lovely things she has had—and is never to have again. The after years are made up, so many times, of things one has had—rounded off and put away forever."

"I know," returned Juliet, with a far-away look in her eyes. "I remember the day I grew up—almost the hour. It was the day I came here."

Madame stooped to kiss the girl's rosy cheek, then swiftly turned the talk to linen and lace. Always quick to observe, Juliet had ac-

Scarlet Signals

quired little graces of tone and manner, softened her abruptness, and, guided by loving tact, had begun to bloom like a primrose in a sunny window.

"When—when Miss Bernard comes back again," asked Juliet, wistfully, "shall I have to go?"

"No, dear—indeed no! This is your home until the right man comes a-wooing, and takes you to a little house of your own."

Scarlet signals flamed in Juliet's cheeks as she earnestly devoted herself to her sewing, and Madame smiled. Already, in quiet moments, she had planned a pretty wedding gown for Juliet, and a still prettier wedding.

Allison came frequently, sometimes alone and sometimes with his father or Doctor Jack. He had remarked once that when he desired to consult his physician, he always knew where to find him. Madame affected not to notice that a strange young man had become a veritable part of her family, for she liked Doctor Jack and made him very welcome, morning, noon, and night.

On Wednesdays, the men of the other household dined with her. Saturdays, she and Juliet were honoured guests at the Colonel's, though he deprecated his own hospitality. "A house needs a woman at the head of it," he said. "It was different when Miss Rose was here."

Where is Rose?

"Indeed it was," thought Allison, though he did not put it into words.

At the end of the month, when it was cool enough to make an open fire seem the most cheerful of companions, Madame had them all at her own table. Juliet was surpassingly lovely in her first long gown, of ivory-tinted chiffon, ornamented only by hand embroidery and a bit of deep-toned lace. Her wavy hair was gathered into a loose knot, from which tiny tendrils escaped to cling about her face. Madame had put a pink rose into her hair, slipped another into her belt, and had been well pleased with the work of her own hands.

After dinner, while Juliet played piquet with the Colonel, and Doctor Jack sat quietly in the shadow, where he could watch every play of light and shade upon the girl's lovely changing face, Allison drew Madame into the library and quietly closed the door.

"Aunt Francesca," he said, without preliminary, "I 've been more kinds of a fool in a few months than most men can manage to be in a lifetime."

"Yes," Madame agreed, with a cool little smile.

"Where is Rose?" he demanded.

"Rose," replied Madame, lightly, "has gone away."

"I know that," he flashed back. "I realise

it every day and every hour of my life. I asked where she was."

"And I," answered Madame, imperturably, "have told you. She is simply 'away.'"

"Is she well?"

"Yes."

"Is she happy?'

"Of course. Why not? Beauty, health, talent, sufficient income, love—what more can a woman desire?"

"Aunt Francesca! Tell me, please. Where is Rose?"

"When I was married," answered Madame, idly fingering an ivory paper knife, "I went to live in a little house in the woods."

"Yes? Where is Rose?"

"It was only a tiny place, but a brook sang in front of it, night and day."

"Must have been pretty. Where did Rose go?"

"It was very quiet there. It would have been a good place to work, if either of us had been musical, or anything of that sort."

"Charming," replied Allison, absently.

"It was n't far from town, either. We could take a train at two o'clock, and reach Holly Springs a little after three. It was half a mile up the main road from the station, and, as we had no horse, we always walked."

"Nice walk," said Allison, dejectedly.

"I have never been back since—since I was

left alone. Sometimes I have thought my little house ought to have someone to look after it. A house gets lonely, too, with no one to care for it."

A Hopeless Idiot!

"I suppose so. Is Rose coming back?"

"I have often thought of the little Summer cottages, huddled together like frightened children, when the life and laughter had gone and Winter was swiftly approaching. How cold their walls must be and how empty the heart of a little house, when there is no fire there! So like a woman, when love has gone out of her life."

Allison sighed and began to sharpen his pencil. Madame observed that his hands were trembling.

"I see," he said. "I don't deserve to know where she is, and Rose doesn't want me chasing after her. Never mind—I had it coming to me, I guess. What a hopeless idiot I've been!"

"Yes," agreed Madame, cordially. "Carlyle says that 'there is no other entirely fatal person.'"

Something in her tone gave him courage for another question. "Once for all, Aunt Francesca, will you tell me where Rose is?"

"George Washington was a great man," Madame observed. "He never told a lie. If he had promised not to tell anything, he never told it." Then she added, with swift

Allison's Errand

irrelevance, "this used to be a very pleasant time of the year at Holly Springs."

A great light broke in upon Allison. "Aunt Francesca!" he cried. He put his arms around her, lifted her from her chair, and nearly smothered her in a bear-like embrace. "God bless you!"

"He has," murmured Madame, disengaging herself. "My foster son has been a dunce, but his reason is now restored."

The two o'clock train to Holly Springs did not leave town until three, so Allison waited for an hour in the station, fuming with impatience. Both Colonel Kent and the Doctor had offered to accompany him, individually or together, but he had brusquely put them aside.

"Don't worry," he said. "My name and address are in my pocket and also inside my hat. I 'll check my grip and be tenderly considerate of my left hand. Good-bye."

When he had gone Colonel Kent anxiously turned to the doctor. "Where do you suppose —and why—— "

"*Cherchez la femme,*" returned the Doctor.

"What makes you think so? It 's not —— "

"It 's about the only errand a man can go on, and not be willing to take another chap along. And I 'll bet anything I 've got, ex-

Love Finds a Way

cept my girl and my buzz-cart, that it is n't the fair, false one we met at the hour of her elopement."

"Must be Rose, then," said the Colonel, half to himself, "but I thought nobody knew where she was."

"Love will find a way," hummed Doctor Jack. "I suppose you don't care to go for a ride this afternoon?"

"Not I," laughed the Colonel. "Why don't you take Juliet?"

"All right, since you ask me to. I wonder," he continued to himself, as he went toward Madame Bernard's at the highest rate of speed, "just how a fellow would go to work to find a woman who had left no address? Sixth sense, I suppose, or perhaps seventh or eighth."

Yet Allison was doing very well, with only the five senses of the normal human being to aid him in his search. He left the train at the sleepy little place known as "Holly Springs," and walked up the main road as though he knew the way.

"Half a mile," he said to himself, "and a little brown house in the woods with a brook singing in front of it. Ought to get to it pretty soon."

The prattling brook was half asleep in its narrow channel, but the gentle murmur was audible to one who stopped in the road to listen. It did not cross the road, but turned

Allison Enters the Little House

away, frightened, from the dusty highway of a modest civilisation, and went back into the woods, where it met another brook and travelled to the river in company.

The house, just back of the singing stream, was a little place, as Madame Bernard had said, but, though he rapped repeatedly, no one answered. So he lifted the latch and cautiously stepped in.

A grand piano, unblushingly new, and evidently of recent importation from the city, occupied most of the tiny living-room. The embers of a wood fire lay on the hearth and the room was faintly scented with the sweet smoke of hard pine. A well-known and well-worn sonata was on the music rack; a volume of Chopin had fallen to the floor. Allison picked it up, and put it in its place. On the piano was some of his own music, stamped with his Berlin address.

A familiar hat, trimmed with crushed roses, lay on the window seat. The faint, indefinable scent of attar of roses was dimly to be discerned as a sort of background for the fragrant smoke. An open book lay face downward on the table; a bit of dainty needlework was thrown carelessly across the chair. An envelope addressed to "Madame Francesca Bernard" was on the old-fashioned writing desk, and a single page of rose-stamped paper lay near it, bearing, in a familiar hand: "My Dearest."

The Old Days Came Back

The two words filled Allison with panic. Not knowing how Rose was wont to address the little old lady they both loved, he conjured up the forbidding spectre of The Other Man, that had haunted him for weeks past.

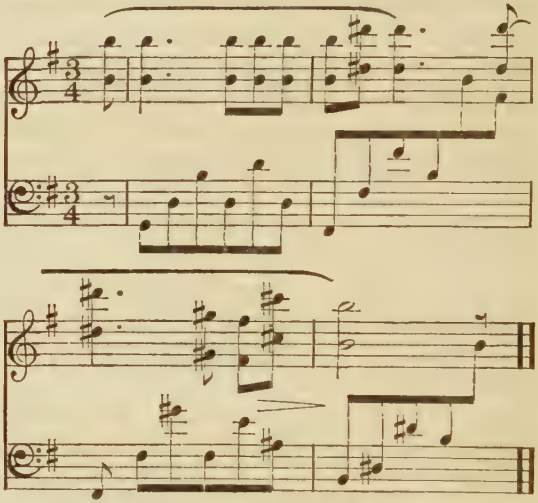
Sighing, he sat down at the piano, and began to drum idly, with one hand. "Wonder if I could use the other," he thought. "Pretty stiff, I guess."

He began to play, from memory:

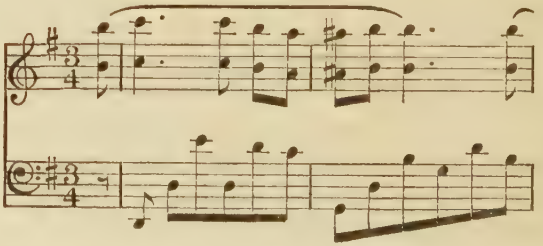
and outside a woman paused, almost at the threshold, with her hands upon her heart. In a sudden throb of pain, the old days came back. She saw herself at the piano, aching with love

Was It a Ghost?

and longing, while just beyond, in an old moonlit garden, Allison made love to Isabel.



Was it a ghost, or was it—? No, she was only foolish. Aunt Francesca had promised not to tell, and she never broke her word. Besides, why should he seek her?



Rose Crossed the Threshold

"It 's only someone who has stopped in passing," Rose thought, "to ask the way to the next town, or to get a glass of water, or—I won't be foolish ! I 'll go in ! "

So she crossed the threshold, into the house where Love lived.

At the sound of her step, the man turned quickly, the music ending in a broken chord.

"You ! " she gasped. "Oh, how could you come ! "

"By train," answered Allison, gently, "and then by walking. I 've frightened you, Rose."

"No," she stammered sinking into a chair. "I 'm—I 'm surprised, of course. I 'm glad you 're well enough to be about again. Did—is anything wrong with Aunt Francesca? " she asked, anxiously.

"Indeed there is n't. She was blooming like a lilac bush in May, when I saw her last night."

"Did—did—she tell you? "

"She did not," he returned, concisely.

The Other Man

"Then how—how——?"

"I just came. What made you think you could get away from me?"

"I was n't—getting away," she returned, with difficulty. "I was just tired—and I came here to—to rest—and to work," she concluded, lamely. "You did n't need me."

"Not need you," he cried, stretching his trembling hands toward her. "Oh, Rose, I need you always!"

Slowly the colour ebbed from her face, leaving her white to the lips. "Don't," she said, pitifully.

"Oh, I know," he flashed back, bitterly. "I 've lost any shadow of right I might ever have had, because I was a blind fool, and I never had any chance anyway. All I can do is to go on loving you, needing you, wanting you; seeing your face before me every hour of the day and night, thirsting for you with every fibre of me. All I have to keep is an empty husk of memory—those few weeks you were kind to me. At least I had you with me, though your heart belonged to someone else."

"Someone else?" she repeated, curiously. The colour was coming back slowly now.

"Yes. Have you forgotten you told me? That day, don't you remember, you said you had loved another man who did not care for you?"

Rose nodded. Her face was like a crimson

flower swaying on a slender stem. "I said," she began, "that I had loved a man who did not care for me, and that I always would. Was n't that it?'

"Something like that. I wish to God I could change places with him."

"Did I," hesitated Rose, "are you sure—that I said—another man, or was it just—a man?"

"Rose! What do you mean?"

Covered with lovely confusion, she stumbled over to the window, where she might hide her burning face from him. "Don't you think," she asked, unsteadily, "that it is beautiful here? This is Aunt Francesca's little house, where she came when she was first married. She always calls it 'the little house where Love lived.'"

"And I came here," she went on, courageously, "because, in a house where Love—had lived, I thought there might be some—for——"

Her voice trailed off into an indistinct murmur. "Rose," cried Allison, "could n't you give me just what I had before? Could n't we go back, and never mind the other man?"

"There 's never any going back," she answered, in a whisper. Her heart was beating wildly because he was so near. "And did I say—are you sure I said—another man?"

"Rose! Rose! Look at me! Tell me,

"Are You Sure?"

Who he Was

for God's sake, who he was—or is. I can't bear it!"

She turned toward him. "Look," she said, softly. "Look in my face and see."

For a tense instant he hesitated. Then, with a little cry of joy, he clasped her close forever, having seen his own face mirrored in her happy eyes.

THE END